

**The Confession of Faith of
The Body of Christ SSJ**

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The Belgic Confession of Faith

Part 1

Based on the Belgic Confession of faith authored by Guido de Bräs, a preacher of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands, who died a martyr to the faith in the year 1567. All additions and subtractions from the original noted. (Bold entries are additions, subtractions are footnoted.)

Article 1: The Only God

- We all believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God -- eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite, almighty; **Holy**, completely wise, just, and good, and the overflowing source of all good.

Article 2: The Means by Which We Know God

- We know him by two means:
First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: his eternal power and his divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20.
All these things are enough to convict men and to leave them without excuse.
Second, he makes himself known to us more openly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for his glory and for the salvation of his own.

Article 3: The Written Word of God

- We confess that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of men, but that holy men of God spoke, being moved by the Holy Spirit, as Peter says.^{^1}

Afterwards our God-- because of the special care he has for us and our salvation-- commanded his servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit this revealed Word to writing. He himself wrote with his own finger the two tables of the law.

Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.

^{^1} 2 Pet. 1:21, **2 Tim 3:16**

Article 4: The Canonical Books

- We include in the Holy Scripture the two volumes of the Old and New Testaments. They are canonical books with which there can be no quarrel at all.

In the church of God the list is as follows: In the Old Testament, the five books of Moses-- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; the books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth; the two books of Samuel, and two of Kings; the two books of Chronicles,¹ the first book of Ezra; Nehemiah, Esther, Job; the Psalms of David; the three books of Solomon-- Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song; the four major prophets-- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel; and then the other twelve minor prophets-- Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

In the New Testament, the four gospels-- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles; the fourteen letters of Paul-- to the Romans; the two letters to the Corinthians; to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians; the two letters to the Thessalonians; the two letters to Timothy; to Titus, Philemon. The letter to the Hebrews.²

¹“called Paralipomenon”- obsolete name for the Old Testament books of I Chronicles and II Chronicles

²Originally part of the list of Paul's letters, this epistle, not specifically designated in the Scriptures as “of Paul”, is listed separately.

The seven letters of the other apostles-- one of James; two of Peter; three of John; one of Jude; and the Revelation of the apostle John.

Article 5: The Authority of Scripture

- We receive all these books and these only as holy and canonical, for the regulating, founding, and establishing of our faith.
- And we believe without a doubt all things contained in them-- not so much because the church receives and approves them as such but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God. For even the blind themselves are able to see that the things predicted in them do happen.

Article 6: The Difference Between Canonical and Apocryphal Books

- We distinguish between these holy books and the apocryphal ones, which are the third and fourth books of Esdras; the books of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Jesus Sirach, Baruch; what was added to the Story of Esther; the Song of the Three Children in the Furnace; the Story of Susannah; the Story of Bell and the Dragon; the Prayer of Manasseh; and the two books of Maccabees.
The church may certainly read these books and learn from them as far as they agree with the canonical books. But they do not have such power and virtue that one could confirm from their testimony any point of faith or of the Christian religion. Much less can they detract from the authority of the other holy books.

Article 7: The Sufficiency of Scripture

- We believe that this Holy Scripture contains the will of God completely and that everything one must believe to be saved is sufficiently taught in it. For since the entire manner of service which God requires of us is described in it at great length, no one-- even an apostle or an angel from heaven, as Paul says--² ought to teach

other than what the Holy Scriptures have already taught us. For since it is forbidden to add to or subtract from the Word of God,³ this plainly demonstrates that the teaching is perfect and complete in all respects.

Therefore we must not consider human writings-- no matter how holy their authors may have been-- equal to the divine writings; nor may we put custom, nor the majority, nor age, nor the passage of time or persons, nor councils, decrees, or official decisions above the truth of God, for truth is above everything else.

For all human beings are liars by nature and more vain than vanity itself.

Therefore we reject with all our hearts everything that does not agree with this infallible rule, as we are taught to do by the apostles when they say, "Test the spirits to see if they are of God,"⁴ and also, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house." ⁵ ² Gal. 1:8 ³ Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19 ⁴ 1 John 4:1 ⁵ 2 John 10

Article 8: The Trinity

- In keeping with this truth and Word of God we believe in one God, who is one single essence, in whom there are three persons, really, truly, and eternally distinct according to their incommunicable properties-- namely, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is the cause, origin, and source of all things, visible as well as invisible-
though through the Son.

The Son is the Word, the Wisdom, and the image of the Father.

The Holy Spirit is the eternal power and might, proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Nevertheless, this distinction does not divide God into three, since Scripture teaches us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each has his own subsistence distinguished by characteristics-- yet in such a way that these three persons are only one God.

It is evident then that the Father is not the Son and that the Son is not the Father, and that likewise the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son.

Nevertheless, these persons, thus distinct, are neither divided nor fused or mixed together.

For the Father did not take on flesh, nor did the Spirit, but only the Son.

The Father was never without his Son, nor without his Holy Spirit, since all these are equal from eternity, in one and the same essence. There is neither a first nor a last, for all three are one in truth and power, in goodness and mercy.

Article 9: The Scriptural Witness on the Trinity

- All these things we know from the testimonies of Holy Scripture as well as from the effects of the persons, especially from those we feel within ourselves.

The testimonies of the Holy Scriptures, which teach us to believe in this Holy Trinity, are written in many places of the Old Testament, which need not be enumerated but only chosen with discretion.

In the book of Genesis God says, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness." So "God created man in his own image"-- indeed, "male and female he created them."⁶ "Behold, man has become like one of us."⁷

It appears from this that there is a plurality of persons within the Deity, when he says, "Let us make man in our image"-- and afterwards he indicates the unity when he says, "God created."

It is true that he does not say here how many persons there are-- but what is somewhat obscure to us in the Old Testament is very clear in the New.

For when our Lord was baptized in the Jordan, the voice of the Father was heard saying, "This is my dear Son";⁸ the Son was seen in the water; and the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove.

So, in the baptism of all believers this form was prescribed by Christ: "Baptize all people in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."⁹

In the Gospel according to Luke the angel Gabriel says to Mary, the mother of our Lord: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and therefore that holy one to be born of you shall be called the Son of God."¹⁰

And in another place it says: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you."¹¹

"There are three who bear witness in heaven-- the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit-- and these three are one."¹²

In all these passages we are fully taught that there are three persons in the one and only divine essence. And although this doctrine surpasses human understanding, we nevertheless believe it now, through the Word, waiting to know and enjoy it fully in heaven. Furthermore, we must note the particular works and activities of these three persons in relation to us. The Father is called our Creator, by reason of his power. The Son is our Savior and Redeemer, by his blood. The Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier, by his living in our hearts.

This doctrine of the holy Trinity has always been maintained in the true church, from the time of the apostles until the present, against Jews, Muslims, and certain false Christians and heretics, such as Marcion, Mani, Praxeas, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Arius, and others like them, who were rightly condemned by the holy fathers.

We add to this The Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, who are condemned as heretics.

And so, in this matter we willingly accept the three ecumenical creeds-- the Apostles'³, Nicene, and Athanasian-- as well as what the ancient fathers decided in agreement with them.

⁶ Gen. 1:26-27 ⁷ Gen. 3:22 ⁸ Matt. 3:17 ⁹ Matt. 28:19 ¹⁰ Luke 1:35
¹¹ 2 Cor. 13:14 ¹² 1 John 5:7 (KJV)

³Note on the phrase "Descended to the dead" in the creed: The importance and meaning of this phrase in the creed has been debated and misunderstood. We feel that, though there is great mystery and many unanswered questions related to this fact, this phrase should be left in the creed, but must be highlighted and noted. In reference to Christ's descending to the dead, we would want to protect the body of Christ from any misunderstanding by noting what the scriptures make clear:

1- After Christ's death on the cross and after being made alive in the Spirit He proclaimed victory over the spirits who are in prison in accordance with 1 Peter 3:18-19. This was not a preaching of the gospel as to give the spirits imprisoned a second chance, it was an announcement of victory.

2- The day that Jesus died upon the cross He was in paradise, as He says to the thief on the cross. (Luke 23:43)

3- The work of atonement was absolutely completed when He died on the cross, as Jesus says when upon His death He claims that His work is "finished." (John 19:30)

Article 10: The Deity of Christ

- We believe that Jesus Christ, according to his divine nature, is the only Son of God-- eternally begotten, not made nor created, for then he would be a creature.

He is one in essence with the Father; coeternal; the exact image of the person of the Father and the "reflection of his glory,"^{^13} being in all things like him.

He is the Son of God not only from the time he assumed our nature but from all eternity, as the following testimonies teach us when they are taken together.

Moses says that God "created the world";^{^14} and John says that "all things were created by the Word,"^{^15} which he calls God. The apostle says that "God made the world by his Son."^{^16} He also says that "God created all things by Jesus Christ."^{^17}

And so it must follow that he who is called God, the Word, the Son, and Jesus Christ already existed when all things were created by him.

Therefore the prophet Micah says that his origin is "from ancient times, from eternity."^{^18} And the apostle says that he has "neither beginning of days nor end of life."^{^19}

So then, he is the true eternal God, the Almighty, whom we invoke, worship, and serve.

^{^13} Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3 ^{^14} Gen. 1:1 ^{^15} John 1:3 ^{^16} Heb. 1:2 ^{^17} Col. 1:16 ^{^18} Mic. 5:2 ^{^19} Heb. 7:3

Article 11: The Deity of the Holy Spirit

- We believe and confess also that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son-- neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but only proceeding from the two of them. In regard to order, he is the third person of the Trinity-- of one and the same essence, and majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son. He is true and eternal God, as the Holy Scriptures teach us.

Article 12: The Creation of All Things

- We believe that the Father created heaven and earth and all other creatures from nothing, when it seemed good to him, by his Word--that is to say, by his Son.

He has given all creatures their being, form, and appearance, and their various functions for serving their Creator.

Even now he also sustains and governs them all, according to his eternal providence, and by his infinite power, that they may serve man, in order that man may serve God.

He has also created the angels good, that they might be his messengers and serve his elect.

Some of them have fallen from the excellence in which God created them into eternal perdition; and the others have persisted and remained in their original state, by the grace of God.

The devils and evil spirits are so corrupt that they are enemies of God and of everything good. They lie in wait for the church and every member of it like thieves, with all their power, to destroy and spoil everything by their deceptions.

So then, by their own wickedness they are condemned to everlasting damnation, daily awaiting their torments.

For that reason we detest the error of the Sadducees, who deny that there are spirits and angels, and also the error of the Manicheans, who say that the devils originated by themselves, being evil by nature, without having been corrupted.

Article 13: The Doctrine of God's Providence

- We believe that this good God, after he created all things, did not abandon them to chance or fortune but leads and governs them according to his holy will, in such a way that nothing happens in this world without his orderly arrangement.

Yet God is not the author of, nor can he be charged with, the sin that occurs. **That is, He is not the perpetrator of sin, but He is the planner of all things.** For his power and goodness are so great

and incomprehensible that he arranges and does his work very well and justly even when the devils and wicked men act unjustly.

We do not wish to inquire with undue curiosity into what he does that surpasses human understanding and is beyond our ability to comprehend. But in all humility and reverence we adore the just judgments of God, which are hidden from us, being content to be Christ's disciples, so as to learn only what he shows us in his Word, without going beyond those limits.

This doctrine gives us unspeakable comfort since it teaches us that nothing can happen to us by chance but only by the arrangement of our gracious heavenly Father. He watches over us with fatherly care, keeping all creatures under his control, so that not one of the hairs on our heads (for they are all numbered) nor even a little bird can fall to the ground^{^20} without the will of our Father.

In this thought we rest, knowing that he holds in check the devils and all our enemies, who cannot hurt us without his permission and will.

For that reason we reject the damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God involves himself in nothing and leaves everything to chance.

^{^20} Matt. 10:29-30

Article 14: The Creation and Fall of Man

- We believe that God created man from the dust of the earth and made and formed him in his image and likeness-- good, just, and holy; able by his own will to conform in all things to the will of God. But when he was in honor he did not understand it^{^21} and did not recognize his excellence. But he subjected himself willingly to sin and consequently to death and the curse, lending his ear to the word of the devil.

For he transgressed the commandment of life, which he had received, and by his sin he separated himself from God, who was his true life, having corrupted his entire nature.

So he made himself guilty and subject to physical and spiritual death, having become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways. He lost all his excellent gifts which he had received from God, and he

retained none of them except for small traces which are enough to make him inexcusable.

Moreover, all the light in us is turned to darkness, as the Scripture teaches us: "The light shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not receive it."²² Here John calls men "darkness."

Therefore we reject everything taught to the contrary concerning man's free will, since man is nothing but the slave of sin and cannot do a thing unless it is "given him from heaven."²³

For who can boast of being able to do anything good by himself, since Christ says, "No one can come to me unless my Father who sent me draws him"?²⁴

Who can glory in his own will when he understands that "the mind of the flesh is enmity against God"?²⁵ Who can speak of his own knowledge in view of the fact that "the natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit of God"?²⁶

In short, who can produce a single thought, since he knows that we are "not able to think a thing" about ourselves, by ourselves, but that "our ability is from God"?²⁷

And therefore, what the apostle says ought rightly to stand fixed and firm: "God works within us both to will and to do according to his good pleasure."²⁸

For there is no understanding nor will conforming to God's understanding and will apart from Christ's involvement, as he teaches us when he says, "Without me you can do nothing."²⁹ ²¹

Ps. 49:20 ²² John 1:5 ²³ John 3:27 ²⁴ John 6:44 ²⁵ Rom. 8:7 ²⁶ 1 Cor. 2:14 ²⁷ 2 Cor. 3:5 ²⁸ Phil. 2:13 ²⁹ John 15:5

Article 15: The Doctrine of Original Sin

- We believe that by the disobedience of Adam original sin has been spread through the whole human race.

It is a corruption of all nature-- an inherited depravity which even infects small infants in their mother's womb, and the root which produces in man every sort of sin. It is therefore so vile and enormous in God's sight that it is enough to condemn the human race, and it is not abolished or wholly uprooted even by baptism,

seeing that sin constantly boils forth as though from a contaminated spring.

Nevertheless, it is not imputed to God's children for their condemnation but is forgiven by his grace and mercy-- not to put them to sleep but so that the awareness of this corruption might often make believers groan as they long to be set free from the "body of this death."³⁰

Therefore we reject the error of the Pelagians who say that this sin is nothing else than a matter of imitation.

³⁰ Rom. 7:24

Article 16: The Doctrine of Election

- We believe that-- all Adam's descendants having thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of the first man-- God showed himself to be as he is: merciful and just.

He is merciful in withdrawing and saving from this perdition those whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable counsel, has elected and chosen in Jesus Christ our Lord by his pure goodness, without any consideration of their works.

He is just in leaving the others in their ruin and fall into which they plunged themselves.

Article 17: The Recovery of Fallen Man

- We believe that our good God, by his marvelous wisdom and goodness, seeing that man had plunged himself in this manner into both physical and spiritual death and made himself completely miserable, set out to find him, though man, trembling all over, was fleeing from him. And he comforted him, promising to give him his Son, "born of a woman,"³¹ to crush the head of the serpent,³² and to make him blessed. ³¹ Gal. 4:4 ³² Gen. 3:15

Article 18: The Incarnation

- So then we confess that God fulfilled the promise which he had made to the early fathers by the mouth of his holy prophets when he sent his only and eternal Son into the world at the time set by him.

The Son took the "form of a servant" and was made in the "likeness of man,"^{^33} truly assuming a real human nature, with all its weaknesses, except for sin; being conceived in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, without male participation.

And he not only assumed human nature as far as the body is concerned but also a real human soul, in order that he might be a real human being. For since the soul had been lost as well as the body he had to assume them both to save them both together.

Therefore we confess, against the heresy of the Anabaptists who deny that Christ assumed human flesh from his mother, that he "shared the very flesh and blood of children";^{^34} that he is "fruit of the loins of David" according to the flesh;^{^35} "born of the seed of David" according to the flesh;^{^36} "fruit of the womb of the virgin Mary";^{^37} "born of a woman";^{^38} "the seed of David";^{^39} "a shoot from the root of Jesse";^{^40} "the offspring of Judah,"^{^41} having descended from the Jews according to the flesh; "from the seed of Abraham"-- for he "assumed Abraham's seed" and was "made like his brothers except for sin."^{^42}

In this way he is truly our Immanuel-- that is: "God with us." ^{^43}

^{^33} Phil. 2:7 ^{^34} Heb. 2:14 ^{^35} Acts 2:30 ^{^36} Rom. 1:3 ^{^37} Luke 1:42 ^{^38} Gal. 4:4 ^{^39} 2 Tim. 2:8 ^{^40} Rom. 15:12 ^{^41} Heb. 7:14 ^{^42} Heb. 2:17; 4:15 ^{^43} Matt. 1:23

Article 19: The Two Natures of Christ

- We believe that by being thus conceived the person of the Son has been inseparably united and joined together with human nature, in such a way that there are not two Sons of God, nor two persons, but two natures united in a single person, with each nature retaining its own distinct properties.

Thus his divine nature has always remained uncreated, without beginning of days or end of life,^{^44} filling heaven and earth.

His human nature has not lost its properties but continues to have those of a creature-- it has a beginning of days; it is of a finite nature and retains all that belongs to a real body. And even though he, by his resurrection, gave it immortality, that nonetheless did not

change the reality of his human nature; for our salvation and resurrection depend also on the reality of his body.

But these two natures are so united together in one person that they are not even separated by his death.

So then, what he committed to his Father when he died was a real human spirit which left his body. But meanwhile his divine nature remained united with his human nature even when he was lying in the grave; and his deity never ceased to be in him, just as it was in him when he was a little child, though for a while it did not show itself as such.

These are the reasons why we confess him to be true God and true man-- true God in order to conquer death by his power, and true man that he might die for us in the weakness of his flesh.

⁴Heb. 7:3

Article 20: The Justice and Mercy of God in Christ

- We believe that God-- who is perfectly merciful and **perfectly**⁴ just-- sent his Son to assume the nature in which the disobedience had been committed, in order to bear in it the punishment of sin by his most bitter passion and death.

So God made known his justice toward his Son, who was charged with our sin, and he poured out his goodness and mercy on us, who are guilty and worthy of damnation, giving to us his Son to die, by a most perfect love, and raising him to life for our justification, in order that by him we might have immortality and eternal life.

Article 21: The Atonement

- We believe that Jesus Christ is a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek-- made such by an oath-- and that he presented himself in our name before his Father, to appease his wrath with full satisfaction by offering himself on the tree of the cross and pouring out his precious blood for the cleansing of our sins, as the prophets had predicted.

⁴The original- "also very just." This has been clarified.

For it is written that "the chastisement of our peace" was placed on the Son of God and that "we are healed by his wounds." He was "led to death as a lamb"; he was "numbered among sinners"^{^45} and condemned as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, though Pilate had declared that he was innocent.

So he paid back what he had not stolen,^{^46} and he suffered-- the "just for the unjust,"^{^47} in both his body and his soul-- in such a way that when he senses the horrible punishment required by our sins his sweat became like "big drops of blood falling on the ground."^{^48} He cried, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"^{^49} And he endured all this for the forgiveness of our sins.

Therefore we rightly say with Paul that we "know nothing but Jesus and him crucified";^{^50} we consider all things as "dung for the excellence of the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."^{^51} We find all comforts in his wounds and have no need to seek or invent any other means to reconcile ourselves with God than this one and only sacrifice, once made, which renders believers perfect forever.

This is also why the angel of God called him Jesus-- that is, "Savior"-- because he would save his people from their sins.

^{^52} ^{^45} Isa. 53:4-12 ^{^46} Ps. 69:4 ^{^47} 1 Pet. 3:18 ^{^48} Luke 22:44 ^{^49} Matt. 27:46 ^{^50} 1 Cor. 2:2 ^{^51} Phil. 3:8 ^{^52} Matt. 1:21

Article 22: The Righteousness of Faith

- We believe that for us to acquire the true knowledge of this great mystery the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts a true faith that embraces Jesus Christ, with all his merits, and makes him its own, and no longer looks for anything apart from him.

For it must necessarily follow that either all that is required for our salvation is not in Christ or, if all is in him, then he who has Christ by faith has his salvation entirely.

Therefore, to say that Christ is not enough but that something else is needed as well is a most enormous blasphemy against God-- for it then would follow that Jesus Christ is only half a Savior. And therefore we justly say with Paul that we are justified "by faith alone" or by faith "apart from works."^{^53}

However, we do not mean, properly speaking, that it is faith itself that justifies us-- for faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness.

But Jesus Christ is our righteousness in making available to us all his merits and all the holy works he has done for us and in our place. And faith is the instrument that keeps us in communion with him and with all his benefits.

When those benefits are made ours they are more than enough to absolve us of our sins.

^53 Rom. 3:28

Article 23: The Justification of Sinners

- We believe that our blessedness lies in the forgiveness of our sins because of Jesus Christ, and that in it our righteousness before God is contained, as David and Paul teach us when they declare that man blessed to whom God grants righteousness apart from works.^54 And the same apostle says that we are justified "freely" or "by grace" through redemption in Jesus Christ.^55 And therefore we cling to this foundation, which is firm forever, giving all glory to God, humbling ourselves, and recognizing ourselves as we are; not claiming a thing for ourselves or our merits and leaning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified, which is ours when we believe in him. That is enough to cover all our sins and to make us confident, freeing the conscience from the fear, dread, and terror of God's approach, without doing what our first father, Adam, did, who trembled as he tried to cover himself with fig leaves. In fact, if we had to appear before God relying-- no matter how little-- on ourselves or some other creature, then, alas, we would be swallowed up. Therefore everyone must say with David: "Lord, do not enter into judgment with your servants, for before you no living person shall be justified." ^54 Ps. 32:1; Rom. 4:6 ^55 Rom. 3:24 ^56 Ps. 143:2

Article 24: The Sanctification of Sinners

- We believe that this true faith, produced in man by the hearing of God's Word and by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and

makes him a "new man,"^{^57} causing him to live the "new life"^{^58} and freeing him from the slavery of sin.

Therefore, far from making people cold toward living in a pious and holy way, this justifying faith, quite to the contrary, so works within them that apart from it they will never do a thing out of love for God but only out of love for themselves and fear of being condemned.

So then, it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being, seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls "faith working through love,"^{^59} which leads a man to do by himself the works that God has commanded in his Word.

These works, proceeding from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable to God, since they are all sanctified by his grace. Yet they do not count toward our justification-- for by faith in Christ we are justified, even before we do good works. Otherwise they could not be good, any more than the fruit of a tree could be good if the tree is not good in the first place.

So then, we do good works, but not for merit-- for what would we merit? Rather, we are indebted to God for the good works we do, and not he to us, since it is he who "works in us both to will and do according to his good pleasure" ^{^60}-- thus keeping in mind what is written: "When you have done all that is commanded you, then you shall say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have done what it was our duty to do.'"^{^61}

Yet we do not wish to deny that God rewards good works-- but it is by his grace that he crowns his gifts.

Moreover, although we do good works we do not base our salvation on them; for we cannot do any work that is not defiled by our flesh and also worthy of punishment. And even if we could point to one, memory of a single sin is enough for God to reject that work.

So we would always be in doubt, tossed back and forth without any certainty, and our poor consciences would be tormented constantly if they did not rest on the merit of the suffering and death of our Savior.

^{^57} 2 Cor. 5:17 ^{^58} Rom. 6:4 ^{^59} Gal. 5:6 ^{^60} Phil. 2:13 ^{^61} Luke 17:10

Article 25: The Fulfillment of the Law

- We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended with the coming of Christ, and that all foreshadowings have come to an end, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians. Yet the truth and substance of these things remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled. Nevertheless, we continue to use the witnesses drawn from the law and prophets to confirm us in the gospel and to regulate our lives with full integrity for the glory of God, according to his will.

Article 26: The Intercession of Christ

- We believe that we have no access to God except through the one and only Mediator and Intercessor: Jesus Christ the Righteous.⁶² He therefore was made man, uniting together the divine and human natures, so that we human beings might have access to the divine Majesty. Otherwise we would have no access. But this Mediator, whom the Father has appointed between himself and us, ought not terrify us by his greatness, so that we have to look for another one, according to our fancy. For neither in heaven nor among the creatures on earth is there anyone who loves us more than Jesus Christ does. Although he was "in the form of God," he nevertheless "emptied himself," taking the form of "a man" and "a servant" for us;⁶³ and he made himself "completely like his brothers."⁶⁴ Suppose we had to find another intercessor. Who would love us more than he who gave his life for us, even though "we were his enemies"?⁶⁵ And suppose we had to find one who has prestige and power. Who has as much of these as he who is seated "at the right hand of the Father,"⁶⁶ and who has all power "in heaven and on earth"?⁶⁷ And who will be heard more readily than God's own dearly beloved Son? So then, sheer unbelief has led to the practice of dishonoring the saints, instead of honoring them. That was something the saints never did nor asked for, but which in keeping with their duty, as appears from their writings, they consistently refused.

We should not plead here that we are unworthy-- for it is not a question of offering our prayers on the basis of our own dignity but only on the basis of the excellence and dignity of Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is ours by faith.

Since the apostle for good reason wants us to get rid of this foolish fear-- or rather, this unbelief-- he says to us that Jesus Christ was "made like his brothers in all things," that he might be a high priest who is merciful and faithful to purify the sins of the people.^{^68} For since he suffered, being tempted, he is also able to help those who are tempted.^{^69}

And further, to encourage us more to approach him he says, "Since we have a high priest, Jesus the Son of God, who has entered into heaven, we maintain our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to have compassion for our weaknesses, but one who was tempted in all things, just as we are, except for sin. Let us go then with confidence to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace, in order to be helped."^{^70}

The same apostle says that we "have liberty to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus. Let us go, then, in the assurance of faith...."^{^71}

Likewise, "Christ's priesthood is forever. By this he is able to save completely those who draw near to God through him who always lives to intercede for them."^{^72}

What more do we need? For Christ himself declares: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to my Father but by me."^{^73} Why should we seek another intercessor?

Since it has pleased God to give us his Son as our Intercessor, let us not leave him for another-- or rather seek, without ever finding. For when God gave him to us he knew well that we were sinners.

Therefore, in following the command of Christ we call on the heavenly Father through Christ, our only Mediator, as we are taught by the Lord's Prayer, being assured that we shall obtain all we ask of the Father in his name.

^{^62} 1 John 2:1 ^{^63} Phil. 2:6-8 ^{^64} Heb. 2:17 ^{^65} Rom. 5:10 ^{^66} Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3 ^{^67} Matt. 28:18 ^{^68} Heb. 2:17 ^{^69} Heb. 2:18 ^{^70} Heb. 4:14-16 ^{^71} Heb. 10:19, 22 ^{^72} Heb. 7:24-25 ^{^73} John 14:6

Article 27: The Holy Catholic Church

- We believe and confess one single catholic or universal church-- a holy congregation and gathering of true Christian believers, awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ being washed by his blood, and sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

This church has existed from the beginning of the world and will last until the end, as appears from the fact that Christ is eternal King who cannot be without subjects.

And this holy church is preserved by God against the rage of the whole world, even though for a time it may appear very small in the eyes of men-- as though it were snuffed out.

For example, during the very dangerous time of Ahab the Lord preserved for himself seven thousand men who did not bend their knees to Baal.^{^74}

And so this holy church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or certain persons. But it is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world, though still joined and united in heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith.

^{^74} 1 Kings 19:18

Article 28: The Obligations of Church Members

- We believe that since this holy assembly and congregation is the gathering of those who are saved and there is no **being saved and not being a part of it**⁵, no one ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself, regardless of his status or condition.

But all people are obliged to join and unite with it, keeping the unity of the church by submitting to its instruction and discipline, by bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and by serving to build up one another, according to the gifts God has given them as members of each other in the same body.

⁵Original- "there is no salvation apart from it." This was clarified as to make clear that the church does not save, Christ does, yet you cannot be saved and not be a part of the church.

And to preserve this unity more effectively, it is the duty of all believers, according to God's Word, to separate themselves from those who do not belong to the church, in order to join this assembly wherever God has established it, even if civil authorities and royal decrees forbid and death and physical punishment result. And so, all who withdraw from the church or do not join it act contrary to God's ordinance.

Article 29: The Marks of the True Church

- We believe that we ought to discern diligently and very carefully, by the Word of God, what is the true church-- for all sects in the world today claim for themselves the name of "the church."

We are not speaking here of the company of hypocrites who are mixed among the good in the church and who nonetheless are not part of it, even though they are physically there. But we are speaking of distinguishing the body and fellowship of the true church from all sects that call themselves "the church."

The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head. By these marks one can be assured of recognizing the true church-- and no one ought to be separated from it.

As for those who can belong to the church, we can recognize them by the distinguishing marks of Christians: namely by faith, and by their fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness, once they have received the one and only Savior, Jesus Christ. They love the true God and their neighbors, without turning to the right or left, and they crucify the flesh and its works.

Though great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their lives, appealing constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of the Lord Jesus, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins, through faith in him.

As for the false church, it assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God; it does not want to subject itself to the yoke of Christ; it does not administer the sacraments as Christ commanded in his Word; it rather adds to them or subtracts from them as it pleases; it bases itself on men, more than on Jesus Christ; it persecutes those who live holy lives according to the Word of God and who rebuke it for its faults, greed, and idolatry.

These two churches are easy to recognize and thus to distinguish from each other.

Article 30: The Government of the Church

- We believe that this true church ought to be governed according to the spiritual order that our Lord has taught us in his Word. There should be **elders**⁶ to preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments. There should also be **deacons, along with the elders**,⁷ to make up the council of the church.

By this means true religion is preserved; true doctrine is able to take its course; and evil men are corrected spiritually and held in check, so that also the poor and all the afflicted may be helped and comforted according to their need.

By this means everything will be done well and in good order in the church, when such persons are elected who are faithful and are chosen according to the rule that Paul gave to Timothy. ^75 1 Tim. 3

Article 31: The Officers of the Church

- We believe that ministers of the Word of God, elders, and deacons ought to be chosen to their offices **by the putting forward of the**

⁶Original- "ministers or pastors." Scripturally, we see the office of elder in this role.

⁷Original- "There should be elders and deacons, along with pastors" We confess that pastors are elders, and so no distinction need be made in this context.

elders and affirmation of the body⁸, with prayer in the name of the Lord, and in good order, as the Word of God teaches.

So everyone must be careful not to push himself forward improperly, but he must wait for God's call, so that he may be assured of his calling and be certain that he is chosen by the Lord.

As for the ministers of the Word, they all have the same power and authority, no matter where they may be, since they are all servants of Jesus Christ, the only universal bishop, and the only head of the church.

Moreover, to keep God's holy order from being violated or despised, we say that everyone ought, as much as possible, to hold the ministers of the Word and elders of the church in special esteem, because of the work they do, and be at peace with them, without grumbling, quarreling, or fighting.

Article 32: The Order and Discipline of the Church

- We also believe that although it is useful and good for those who govern the churches to establish and set up a certain order among themselves for maintaining the body of the church, they ought always to guard against deviating from what Christ, our only Master, has ordained for us.

Therefore we reject all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in our worship of God, which bind and force our consciences in any way.

So we accept only what is proper to maintain harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God.

To that end excommunication, with all it involves, according to the Word of God, is required.

⁸Original- "by a legitimate election of the church." We recognize that the body must affirm (and in that way "elect") elders, but wanted the focus to be on the affirming of gifts not merely the "choice" of the body by vote.

Article 33: The Sacraments

- We believe that our good God, mindful of our crudeness and weakness, has ordained sacraments for us to seal his promises in us, to pledge his good will and grace toward us, and also to nourish and sustain our faith.

He has added these to the Word of the gospel to represent better to our external senses both what he enables us to understand by his Word and what he does inwardly in our hearts, confirming in us the salvation he imparts to us.

For they are visible signs and seals of something internal and invisible, by means of which God works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. So they are not empty and hollow signs to fool and deceive us, for their truth is Jesus Christ, without whom they would be nothing.

Moreover, we are satisfied with the number of sacraments that Christ our Master has ordained for us. There are only two: the sacrament of baptism and the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ.

Article 34: The Sacrament of Baptism

- We believe and confess that Jesus Christ, in whom the law is fulfilled, has by his shed blood put an end to every other shedding of blood, which anyone might do or wish to do in order to atone or satisfy for sins.

Having abolished circumcision, which was done with blood, he established in its place the sacrament of baptism. By it we are received into God's church and set apart from all other people and alien religions, that we may be dedicated entirely to him, bearing his mark and sign. It also witnesses to us that he will be our God forever, since he is our gracious Father.

Therefore he has commanded that all those who belong to him be baptized with pure water in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶

In this way he signifies to us that just as water washes away the dirt of the body when it is poured on us and also is seen on the body of the baptized when it is sprinkled on him, so too the blood of Christ

does the same thing internally, in the soul, by the Holy Spirit. It washes and cleanses it from its sins and transforms us from being the children of wrath into the children of God.

This does not happen by the physical water but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God, who is our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharoah, who is the devil, and to enter the spiritual land of Canaan.

So ministers, as far as their work is concerned, give us the sacrament and what is visible, but our Lord gives what the sacrament signifies-- namely the invisible gifts and graces; washing, purifying, and cleansing our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts and filling them with all comfort; giving us true assurance of his fatherly goodness; clothing us with the "new man" and stripping off the "old," with all its works.⁹

⁹^76 Matt. 28:19

Article 35: The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

- We believe and confess that our Savior Jesus Christ has ordained and instituted the sacrament of the Holy Supper to nourish and sustain those who are already born again and ingrafted into his family: his church.

Now those who are born again have two lives in them. The one is physical and temporal-- they have it from the moment of their first birth, and it is common to all. The other is spiritual and heavenly, and is given them in their second birth; it comes through the Word of the gospel in the communion of the body of Christ; and this life is common to God's elect only.

⁹Removed: "For this reason we believe that anyone who aspires to reach eternal life ought to be baptized only once without ever repeating it-- for we cannot be born twice. Yet this baptism is profitable not only when the water is on us and when we receive it but throughout our entire lives. For that reason we detest the error of the Anabaptists who are not content with a single baptism once received and also condemn the baptism of the children of believers. We believe our children ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as little children were circumcised in Israel on the basis of the same promises made to our children. And truly, Christ has shed his blood no less for washing the little children of believers than he did for adults. Therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of what Christ has done for them, just as the Lord commanded in the law that by offering a lamb for them the sacrament of the suffering and death of Christ would be granted them shortly after their birth. This was the sacrament of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, baptism does for our children what circumcision did for the Jewish people. That is why Paul calls baptism the "circumcision of Christ."^{^77 ^77} Col. 2:11"

The original writer held to infant baptism, which we do not confess, and so this has been removed.

Thus, to support the physical and earthly life God has prescribed for us an appropriate earthly and material bread, which is as common to all as life itself also is. But to maintain the spiritual and heavenly life that belongs to believers he has sent a living bread that came down from heaven: namely Jesus Christ, who nourishes and maintains the spiritual life of believers when eaten-- that is, when appropriated and received spiritually by faith.

To represent to us this spiritual and heavenly bread Christ has instituted an earthly and visible bread as the sacrament of his body and wine as the sacrament of his blood. He did this to testify to us that just as truly as we take and hold the sacraments in our hands and eat and drink it in our mouths, by which our life is then sustained, so truly we receive into our souls, for our spiritual life, the true body and true blood of Christ, our only Savior. We receive these by faith, which is the hand and mouth of our souls.

Now it is certain that Jesus Christ did not prescribe his sacraments for us in vain, since he works in us all he represents by these holy signs, although the manner in which he does it goes beyond our understanding and is uncomprehensible to us, just as the operation of God's Spirit is hidden and incomprehensible.

Yet we do not go wrong when we say that what is eaten is Christ's own natural body and what is drunk is his own blood-- but the manner in which we eat it is not by the mouth but by the Spirit, through faith.

In that way Jesus Christ remains always seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven-- but he never refrains on that account to communicate himself to us through faith.

This banquet is a spiritual table at which Christ communicates himself to us with all his benefits. At that table he makes us enjoy himself as much as the merits of his suffering and death, as he nourishes, strengthens, and comforts our poor, desolate souls by the eating of his flesh, and relieves and renews them by the drinking of his blood.

Moreover, though the sacraments and thing signified are joined together, not all receive both of them. The wicked person certainly takes the sacrament, to his condemnation, but does not receive the truth of the sacrament, just as Judas and Simon the Sorcerer both

indeed received the sacrament, but not Christ, who was signified by it. He is communicated only to believers.

Finally, with humility and reverence we receive the holy sacrament in the gathering of God's people, as we engage together, with thanksgiving, in a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Savior, and as we thus confess our faith and Christian religion. Therefore no one should come to this table without examining himself carefully, lest "by eating this bread and drinking this cup he eat and drink to his own judgment."⁷⁸

In short, by the use of this holy sacrament we are moved to a fervent love of God and our neighbors.

Therefore we reject as desecrations of the sacraments all the muddled ideas and damnable inventions that men have added and mixed in with them. And we say that we should be content with the procedure that Christ and the apostles have taught us and speak of these things as they have spoken of them.

⁷⁸ 1 Cor. 11:27

Article 36: The Civil Government

- We believe that because of the depravity of the human race our good God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers. He wants the world to be governed by laws and policies so that human lawlessness may be restrained and that everything may be conducted in good order among human beings. For that purpose he has placed the sword in the hands of the government, to punish evil people and protect the good.¹⁰ Moreover everyone, regardless of status, condition, or rank, must be subject to the government, and pay taxes, and hold its

¹⁰Removed: "And being called in this manner to contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to God, the civil rulers have the task, subject to God's law, of removing every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and to every aspect of divine worship. They should do this while completely refraining from every tendency toward exercising absolute authority, and while functioning in the sphere entrusted to them, with the means belonging to them. And the government's task is not limited to caring for and watching over the public domain but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry, with a view to removing and destroying all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist; to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ; and to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere; to the end that God may be honored and served by everyone, as he requires in his Word."

We confess our submission to the authorities God has established, but do not confess, as the original did, the role of the government to advance the kingdom of God. This section was a correction of the original added in at the synod of 1910.

representatives in honor and respect, and obey them in all things that are not in conflict with God's Word, praying for them that the Lord may be willing to lead them in all their ways and that we may live a peaceful and quiet life in all piety and decency.¹¹

Article 37: The Last Judgment

- Finally we believe, according to God's Word, that when the time appointed by the Lord is come (which is unknown to all creatures) and the number of the elect is complete, our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, bodily and visibly, as he ascended, with great glory and majesty, to declare himself the judge of the living and the dead. He will burn this old world, in fire and flame, in order to cleanse it.

Then all human creatures will appear in person before the great judge-- men, women, and children, who have lived from the beginning until the end of the world.

They will be summoned there by the voice of the archangel and by the sound of the divine trumpet.⁷⁹

For all those who died before that time will be raised from the earth, their spirits being joined and united with their own bodies in which they lived. And as for those who are still alive, they will not die like the others but will be changed "in the twinkling of an eye" from "corruptible to incorruptible."⁸⁰

Then "the books" (that is, the consciences) will be opened, and the dead will be judged according to the things they did in the world,⁸¹ whether good or evil. Indeed, all people will give account of all the idle words they have spoken,⁸² which the world regards as only playing games. And then the secrets and hypocrisies of men will be publicly uncovered in the sight of all.

Therefore, with good reason the thought of this judgment is horrible and dreadful to wicked and evil people. But it is very pleasant and a

¹¹Removed "And on this matter we denounce the Anabaptists, other anarchists, and in general all those who want to reject the authorities and civil officers and to subvert justice by introducing common ownership of goods and corrupting the moral order that God has established among human beings."

This section was moved to the footnotes in the synod of 1985.

great comfort to the righteous and elect, since their total redemption will then be accomplished. They will then receive the fruits of their labor and of the trouble they have suffered; their innocence will be openly recognized by all; and they will see the terrible vengeance that God will bring on the evil ones who tyrannized, oppressed, and tormented them in this world.

The evil ones will be convicted by the witness of their own consciences, and shall be made immortal-- but only to be tormented in the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.^{^83}

In contrast, the faithful and elect will be crowned with glory and honor. The Son of God will "confess their names"^{^84} before God his Father and the holy and elect angels; all tears will be "wiped from their eyes";^{^85} and their cause-- at present condemned as heretical and evil by many judges and civil officers-- will be acknowledged as the "cause of the Son of God."

And as a gracious reward the Lord will make them possess a glory such as the heart of man could never imagine.

So we look forward to that great day with longing in order to enjoy fully the promises of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. ^{^79} 1 Thess. 4:16 ^{^80} 1 Cor. 15:51-53 ^{^81} Rev. 20:12 ^{^82} Matt. 12:36 ^{^83} Matt. 25:14 ^{^84} Matt. 10:32 ^{^85} Rev. 7:17

The Canons of Dort

Part 2

Part 2 is based on The Canons of Dort, written at the Synod of Dort in the Netherlands, 1618-1619, in response to the rise of Arminianism in the Dutch church.

The First Main Point of Doctrine Divine Election and Reprobation

The Judgment Concerning Divine Predestination Which the Synod Declares to Be in Agreement with the Word of God and Accepted Till Now in the Reformed Churches, Set Forth in Several Articles

Article 1: God's Right to Condemn All People

Since all people have sinned in Adam and have come under the sentence of the curse and eternal death, God would have done no one an injustice if it had been his will to leave the entire human race in sin and under the curse, and to condemn them on account of their sin. As the apostle says: "The whole world is liable to the condemnation of God" (Rom. 3:19), "All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), and "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

Article 2: The Manifestation of God's Love

But this is how God showed his love: he sent his only begotten Son into the world, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (1 John 4:9; John 3:16).

Article 3: The Preaching of the Gospel

In order that people may be brought to faith, God mercifully sends messengers of this very joyful message to the people and at the time he wills. By this ministry people are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. For “how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without someone preaching? And how shall they preach unless they have been sent?” (Rom. 10:14-15).

Article 4: A Twofold Response to the Gospel

God’s wrath remains on those who do not believe this gospel. But those who do accept it and embrace Jesus the Savior with a true and living faith are delivered through him from God’s wrath and from destruction, and receive the gift of eternal life.

Article 5: The Sources of Unbelief and of Faith

The cause or blame for this unbelief, as well as for all other sins, is not at all in God, but in humanity. Faith in Jesus Christ, however, and salvation through him is a free gift of God. As Scripture says, “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is a gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). Likewise: “It has been freely given to you to believe in Christ” (Phil. 1:29).

Article 6: God’s Eternal Decree

The fact that some receive from God the gift of faith within time, and that others do not, stems from his eternal decree. For “all his works are known to God from eternity” (Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:11). In accordance with this decree God graciously softens the hearts, however hard, of the elect and inclines them to believe, but by a just judgment God leaves in their wickedness and hardness of heart those who have not been chosen. And in this especially is disclosed to us God’s act—unfathomable, and as merciful as it is just—of distinguishing between people equally lost. This is the well-known decree of election and reprobation revealed in God’s Word. The wicked, impure, and unstable distort this decree to their own ruin, but it provides holy and godly souls with comfort beyond words.

Article 7: Election

Election is God's unchangeable purpose by which he did the following:

Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of his will, God chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from its original innocence into sin and ruin. Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery. God did this in Christ, whom he also appointed from eternity to be the mediator, the head of all those chosen, and the foundation of their salvation.

And so God decreed to give to Christ those chosen for salvation, and to call and draw them effectively into Christ's fellowship through the Word and Spirit. In other words, God decreed to grant them true faith in Christ, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of the Son, to glorify them.

God did all this in order to demonstrate his mercy, to the praise of the riches of God's glorious grace.

As Scripture says, "God chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, so that we should be holy and blameless before him with love; he predestined us whom he adopted as his children through Jesus Christ, in himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, by which he freely made us pleasing to himself in his beloved" (Eph. 1:4-6). And elsewhere, "Those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30).

Article 8: A Single Decree of Election

This election is not of many kinds, but one and the same for all who were to be saved in the Old and the New Testament. For Scripture declares that there is a single good pleasure, purpose, and plan of God's will, by which he chose us from eternity both to grace and to glory, both to salvation

and to the way of salvation, which God prepared in advance for us to walk in.

Article 9: Election Not Based on Foreseen Faith

This same election took place, not on the basis of foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition, as though it were based on a prerequisite cause or condition in the person to be chosen, but rather for the purpose of faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, and so on. Accordingly, election is the source of every saving good. Faith, holiness, and the other saving gifts, and at last eternal life itself, flow forth from election as its fruits and effects. As the apostle says, "He chose us" (not because we were, but) "so that we should be holy and blameless before him in love" (Eph. 1:4).

Article 10: Election Based on God's Good Pleasure

But the cause of this undeserved election is exclusively the good pleasure of God. This does not involve God's choosing certain human qualities or actions from among all those possible as a condition of salvation, but rather involves adopting certain particular persons from among the common mass of sinners as God's own possession. As Scripture says, "When the children were not yet born, and had done nothing either good or bad . . . , she (Rebecca) was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'" (Rom. 9:11-13). Also, "All who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

Article 11: Election Unchangeable

Just as God is most wise, unchangeable, all-knowing, and almighty, so the election made by him can neither be suspended nor altered, revoked, or annulled; neither can God's chosen ones be cast off, nor their number reduced.

Article 12: The Assurance of Election

Assurance of their eternal and unchangeable election to salvation is given to the chosen in due time, though by various stages and in differing

measure. Such assurance comes not by inquisitive searching into the hidden and deep things of God, but by noticing within themselves, with spiritual joy and holy delight, the unmistakable fruits of election pointed out in God's Word—such as a true faith in Christ, a childlike fear of God, a godly sorrow for their sins, a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on.

Article 13: The Fruit of This Assurance

In their awareness and assurance of this election, God's children daily find greater cause to humble themselves before God, to adore the fathomless depth of God's mercies, to cleanse themselves, and to give fervent love in return to the One who first so greatly loved them. This is far from saying that this teaching concerning election, and reflection upon it, make God's children lax in observing his commandments or carnally self-assured. By God's just judgment this does usually happen to those who casually take for granted the grace of election or engage in idle and brazen talk about it but are unwilling to walk in the ways of the chosen.

Article 14: Teaching Election Properly

By God's wise plan, this teaching concerning divine election was proclaimed through the prophets, Christ himself, and the apostles, in Old and New Testament times. It was subsequently committed to writing in the Holy Scriptures. So also today in God's church, for which it was specifically intended, this teaching must be set forth with a spirit of discretion, in a godly and holy manner, at the appropriate time and place, without inquisitive searching into the ways of the Most High. This must be done for the glory of God's most holy name, and for the lively comfort of God's people.

Article 15: Reprobation

Moreover, Holy Scripture most especially highlights this eternal and undeserved grace of our election and brings it out more clearly for us, in that it further bears witness that not all people have been chosen but that

some have not been chosen or have been passed by in God's eternal election—those, that is, concerning whom God, on the basis of his entirely free, most just, irreproachable, and unchangeable good pleasure, made the following decree:

to leave them in the common misery into which, by their own fault, they have plunged themselves; not to grant them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but finally to condemn and eternally punish those who have been left in their own ways and under God's just judgment, not only for their unbelief but also for all their other sins, in order to display his justice. [This they freely chose and wanted.]

And this is the decree of reprobation, which does not at all make God the author of sin (a blasphemous thought!) but rather its fearful, irreproachable, just judge and avenger.

Article 16: Responses to the Teaching of Reprobation

Those who do not yet actively experience within themselves a living faith in Christ or an assured confidence of heart, peace of conscience, a zeal for childlike obedience, and a glorying in God through Christ, but who nevertheless use the means by which God has promised to work these things in us—such people ought not to be alarmed at the mention of reprobation, nor to count themselves among the reprobate; rather they ought to continue diligently in the use of the means, to desire fervently a time of more abundant grace, and to wait for it in reverence and humility. On the other hand, those who seriously desire to turn to God, to be pleasing to God alone, and to be delivered from the body of death, but are not yet able to make such progress along the way of godliness and faith as they would like—such people ought much less to stand in fear of the teaching concerning reprobation, since our merciful God has promised not to snuff out a smoldering wick or break a bruised reed.* However, those who have forgotten God and their Savior Jesus Christ and have abandoned themselves wholly to the cares of the world and the pleasures of the flesh—such people have every reason to stand in fear of this teaching, as long as they do not seriously turn to God.

*Isaiah 42:3

Article 17: [Removed]

Article 18: The Proper Attitude Toward Election and Reprobation

To those who complain about this grace of an undeserved election and about the severity of a just reprobation, we reply with the words of the apostle, "Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" (Rom. 9:20), and with the words of our Savior, "Have I no right to do what I want with my own?" (Matt. 20:15). We, however, with reverent adoration of these secret things, cry out with the apostle: "Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways beyond tracing out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who has first given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36).

Rejection of the Errors by Which the Dutch Churches Have for Some Time Been Disturbed

Having set forth the orthodox teaching concerning election and reprobation, the Synod rejects the errors of those

I- Who teach that the will of God to save those who would believe and persevere in faith and in the obedience of faith is the whole and entire decision of election to salvation, and that nothing else concerning this decision has been revealed in God's Word.

For they deceive the simple and plainly contradict Holy Scripture in its testimony that God does not only wish to save those who would believe, but that he has also from eternity chosen certain particular people to whom, rather than to others, he would within time grant faith in Christ and perseverance. As Scripture says, "I have revealed your name to those whom you gave me" (John 17:6). Likewise, "All who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48), and "He chose us before the foundation of the world so that we should be holy . . ." (Eph. 1:4).

II- Who teach that God's election to eternal life is of many kinds: one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and the latter in turn either incomplete, revocable, conditional, or else complete, irrevocable, and absolute. Likewise, who teach that there is one election to faith and another to salvation, so that there can be an election to justifying faith apart from a nonconditional election to salvation.

For this is an invention of the human mind, devised apart from the Scriptures, which distorts the teaching concerning election and breaks up this golden chain of salvation: "Those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30).

III- Who teach that God's good pleasure and purpose, which Scripture mentions in its teaching of election, does not involve God's choosing certain particular people rather than others, but involves God's choosing, out of all possible conditions (including the works of the law) or out of the whole order of things, the intrinsically unworthy act of faith, as well as the imperfect obedience of faith, to be a condition of salvation; and it involves his graciously wishing to count this as perfect obedience and to look upon it as worthy of the reward of eternal life.

For by this pernicious error the good pleasure of God and the merit of Christ are robbed of their effectiveness and people are drawn away, by unprofitable inquiries, from the truth of undeserved justification and from the simplicity of the Scriptures. It also gives the lie to these words of the apostle: "God called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of works, but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Tim. 1:9).

IV- Who teach that in election to faith a prerequisite condition is that humans should rightly use the light of nature, be upright, unassuming, humble, and disposed to eternal life, as though election depended to some extent on these factors.

For this smacks of Pelagius, and it clearly calls into question the words of the apostle: "We lived at one time in the passions of our flesh, following

the will of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in transgressions, made us alive with Christ, by whose grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with him and seated us with him in heaven in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages we might show the surpassing riches of his grace, according to his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith (and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God) not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:3-9).

V- Who teach that the incomplete and conditional election of particular persons to salvation occurred on the basis of a foreseen faith, repentance, holiness, and godliness, which has just begun or continued for some time; but that complete and nonconditional election occurred on the basis of a foreseen perseverance to the end in faith, repentance, holiness, and godliness. And that this is the gracious and evangelical worthiness, on account of which the one who is chosen is more worthy than the one who is not chosen. And therefore that faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, godliness, and perseverance are not fruits or effects of an unchangeable election to glory, but indispensable conditions and causes, which are prerequisite in those who are to be chosen in the complete election, and which are foreseen as achieved in them.

This runs counter to the entire Scripture, which throughout impresses upon our ears and hearts these sayings among others: "Election is not by works, but by him who calls" (Rom. 9:11-12); "All who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48); "He chose us in himself so that we should be holy" (Eph. 1:4); "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16); "If by grace, not by works" (Rom. 11:6); "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son" (1 John 4:10).

VI- Who teach that not every election to salvation is unchangeable, but that some of the chosen can perish and do in fact perish eternally, with no decision of God to prevent it.

By this gross error they make God changeable, destroy the comfort of the godly concerning the steadfastness of their election, and contradict the

Holy Scriptures, which teach that "the elect cannot be led astray" (Matt. 24:24), that "Christ does not lose those given to him by the Father" (John 6:39), and that "those whom God predestined, called, and justified, he also glorifies" (Rom. 8:30).

VII- Who teach that in this life there is no fruit, no awareness, and no assurance of one's unchangeable election to glory, except as conditioned upon something changeable and contingent.

For not only is it absurd to speak of an uncertain assurance, but these things also militate against the experience of the saints, who with the apostle rejoice from an awareness of their election and sing the praises of this gift of God; who, as Christ urged, "rejoice" with his disciples "that their names have been written in heaven" (Luke 10:20); and finally who hold up against the flaming arrows of the devil's temptations the awareness of their election, with the question "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?" (Rom. 8:33).

VIII- Who teach that it was not on the basis of his just will alone that God decided to leave anyone in the fall of Adam and in the common state of sin and condemnation or to pass anyone by in the imparting of grace necessary for faith and conversion.

For these words stand fast: "He has mercy on whom he wishes, and he hardens whom he wishes" (Rom. 9:18). And also: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (Matt. 13:11). Likewise: "I give glory to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and have revealed them to little children; yes, Father, because that was your pleasure" (Matt. 11:25-26).

IX- Who teach that the cause for God's sending the gospel to one people rather than to another is not merely and solely God's good pleasure, but rather that one people is better and worthier than the other to whom the gospel is not communicated.

For Moses contradicts this when he addresses the people of Israel as follows: "Behold, to Jehovah your God belong the heavens and the

highest heavens, the earth and whatever is in it. But Jehovah was inclined in his affection to love your ancestors alone, and chose out their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as at this day” (Deut. 10:14-15). And also Christ: “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! for if those mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Matt. 11:21).

The Second Main Point of Doctrine Christ's Death and Human Redemption Through It

Article 1: The Punishment Which God's Justice Requires

God is not only supremely merciful, but also supremely just. This justice requires (as God has revealed in the Word) that the sins we have committed against his infinite majesty be punished with both temporal and eternal punishments, of soul as well as body. We cannot escape these punishments unless satisfaction is given to God's justice.

Article 2: The Satisfaction Made by Christ

Since, however, we ourselves cannot give this satisfaction or deliver ourselves from God's wrath, God in boundless mercy has given us as a guarantee his only begotten Son, who was made to be sin and a curse for us, in our place, on the cross, in order that he might give satisfaction for us.

Article 3: The Infinite Value of Christ's Death

This death of God's Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins; it is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world.

Article 4: Reasons for This Infinite Value

This death is of such great value and worth for the reason that the person who suffered it is—as was necessary to be our Savior—not only a true and perfectly holy human, but also the only begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Another reason is that this death was accompanied by the experience of God’s wrath and curse, which we by our sins had fully deserved.

Article 5: The Mandate to Proclaim the Gospel to All

Moreover, it is the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel.

Article 6: Unbelief, a Human Responsibility

However, that many who have been called through the gospel do not repent or believe in Christ but perish in unbelief is not because the sacrifice of Christ offered on the cross is deficient or insufficient, but because they themselves are at fault.

Article 7: Faith God’s Gift

But all who genuinely believe and are delivered and saved by Christ’s death from their sins and from destruction receive this favor solely from God’s grace—which God owes to no one—given to them in Christ from eternity.

Article 8: The Saving Effectiveness of Christ’s Death

For it was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of his Son’s costly death should work itself out in all the elect, in order that God might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation. In other words, it was God’s will that Christ through the blood

of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; that Christ should grant them faith (which, like the Holy Spirit's other saving gifts, he acquired for them by his death). It was also God's will that Christ should cleanse them by his blood from all their sins, both original and actual, whether committed before or after their coming to faith; that he should faithfully preserve them to the very end; and that he should finally present them to himself, a glorious people, without spot or wrinkle.

Article 9: The Fulfillment of God's Plan

This plan, arising out of God's eternal love for the elect, from the beginning of the world to the present time has been powerfully carried out and will also be carried out in the future, the gates of hell seeking vainly to prevail against it. As a result, the elect are gathered into one, all in their own time, and there is always a church of believers founded on Christ's blood, a church which steadfastly loves, persistently worships, and here and in all eternity praises him as her Savior who laid down his life for her on the cross, as a bridegroom for his bride.

Rejection of the Errors

Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

I- Who teach that God the Father appointed his Son to death on the cross without a fixed and definite plan to save anyone by name, so that the necessity, usefulness, and worth of what Christ's death obtained could have stood intact and altogether perfect, complete and whole, even if the redemption that was obtained had never in actual fact been applied to any individual.

For this assertion is an insult to the wisdom of God the Father and to the merit of Jesus Christ, and it is contrary to Scripture. For the Savior speaks as follows: "I lay down my life for the sheep, and I know them" (John 10:15, 27). And Isaiah the prophet says concerning the Savior: "When he

shall make himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, and the will of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand" (Isa. 53:10). Finally, this undermines the article of the creed in which we confess what we believe concerning the Church.

II- Who teach that the purpose of Christ's death was not to establish in actual fact a new covenant of grace by his blood, but only to acquire for the Father the mere right to enter once more into a covenant with humanity, whether of grace or of works.

For this conflicts with Scripture, which teaches that Christ "has become the guarantee and mediator" of a better—that is, a new—covenant (Heb. 7:22; 9:15), "and that a will is in force only when someone has died" (Heb. 9:17).

III- Who teach that Christ, by the satisfaction which he gave, did not certainly merit for anyone salvation itself and the faith by which this satisfaction of Christ is effectively applied to salvation, but only acquired for the Father the authority or plenary will to relate in a new way with humanity and to impose such new conditions as he chose, and that the satisfying of these conditions depends on human free choice; consequently, that it was possible that either all or none would fulfill them.

For they have too low an opinion of the death of Christ, do not at all acknowledge the foremost fruit or benefit which it brings forth, and summon back from hell the Pelagian error.

IV- Who teach that what is involved in the new covenant of grace which God the Father made with humanity through the intervening of Christ's death is not that we are justified before God and saved through faith, insofar as it accepts Christ's merit, but rather that God, having withdrawn his demand for perfect obedience to the law, counts faith itself, and the imperfect obedience of faith, as perfect obedience to the law, and graciously looks upon this as worthy of the reward of eternal life.

For they contradict Scripture: "They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ, whom God presented

as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood” (Rom. 3:24-25). And along with the ungodly Socinus, they introduce a new and foreign justification of humanity before God, against the consensus of the whole church.

V- Who teach that all people have been received into the state of reconciliation and into the grace of the covenant, so that no one on account of original sin is liable to condemnation, or is to be condemned, but that all are free from the guilt of this sin.

For this opinion conflicts with Scripture which asserts that we are by nature children of wrath.

VI- Who make use of the distinction between obtaining and applying in order to instill in the unwary and inexperienced the opinion that God, as far as he is concerned, wished to bestow equally upon all people the benefits which are gained by Christ’s death; but that the distinction by which some rather than others come to share in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life depends on their own free choice (which applies itself to the grace offered indiscriminately) but does not depend on the unique gift of mercy which effectively works in them, so that they, rather than others, apply that grace to themselves.

For, while pretending to set forth this distinction in an acceptable sense, they attempt to give the people the deadly poison of Pelagianism.

VII- Who teach that Christ neither could die, nor had to die, nor did die for those whom God so dearly loved and chose to eternal life, since such people do not need the death of Christ.

For they contradict the apostle, who says: “Christ loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20), and likewise: “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ who died,” that is, for them (Rom. 8:33-34). They also contradict the Savior, who asserts: “I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:15), and “My command is this: Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for one’s friends” (John 15:12-13).

The Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine Human Corruption, Conversion to God, and the Way It Occurs

Article 1: The Effect of the Fall on Human Nature

Human beings were originally created in the image of God and were furnished in mind with a true and sound knowledge of the Creator and things spiritual, in will and heart with righteousness, and in all emotions with purity; indeed, the whole human being was holy. However, rebelling against God at the devil's instigation and by their own free will, they deprived themselves of these outstanding gifts. Rather, in their place they brought upon themselves blindness, terrible darkness, futility, and distortion of judgment in their minds; perversity, defiance, and hardness in their hearts and wills; and finally impurity in all their emotions.

Article 2: The Spread of Corruption

Human beings brought forth children of the same nature as themselves after the fall. That is to say, being corrupt they brought forth corrupt children. The corruption spread, by God's just judgment, from Adam and Eve to all their descendants—except for Christ alone—not by way of imitation (as in former times the Pelagians would have it) but by way of the propagation of their perverted nature.

Article 3: Total Inability

Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin. Without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform.

Article 4: The Inadequacy of the Light of Nature

There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in all people after the fall, by virtue of which they retain some notions about God, natural

things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrate a certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. But this light of nature is far from enabling humans to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to him—so far, in fact, that they do not use it rightly even in matters of nature and society. Instead, in various ways they completely distort this light, whatever its precise character, and suppress it in unrighteousness. In doing so all people render themselves without excuse before God.

Article 5: The Inadequacy of the Law

In this respect, what is true of the light of nature is true also of the Ten Commandments given by God through Moses specifically to the Jews. For humans cannot obtain saving grace through the Decalogue, because, although it does expose the magnitude of their sin and increasingly convict them of their guilt, yet it does not offer a remedy or enable them to escape from human misery, and, indeed, weakened as it is by the flesh, leaves the offender under the curse.

Article 6: The Saving Power of the Gospel

What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law can do, God accomplishes by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word or the ministry of reconciliation. This is the gospel about the Messiah, through which it has pleased God to save believers, in both the Old and the New Testaments.

Article 7: God's Freedom in Revealing the Gospel

In the Old Testament, God revealed this secret of his will to a small number; in the New Testament (now without any distinction between peoples) God discloses it to a large number. The reason for this difference must not be ascribed to the greater worth of one nation over another, or to a better use of the light of nature, but to the free good pleasure and undeserved love of God. Therefore, those who receive so much grace, beyond and in spite of all they deserve, ought to acknowledge it with humble and thankful hearts. On the other hand, with the apostle they

ought to adore (but certainly not inquisitively search into) the severity and justice of God's judgments on the others, who do not receive this grace.

Article 8: The Earnest Call of the Gospel

Nevertheless, all who are called through the gospel are called earnestly. For urgently and most genuinely God makes known in the Word what is pleasing to him: that those who are called should come to God. God also earnestly promises rest for their souls and eternal life to all who do come and believe.

Article 9: Human Responsibility for Rejecting the Gospel

The fact that many who are called through the ministry of the gospel do not come and are not brought to conversion must not be blamed on the gospel, nor on Christ, who is offered through the gospel, nor on God, who calls them through the gospel and even bestows various gifts on them, but on the people themselves who are called. Some in self-assurance do not even entertain the Word of life; others do entertain it but do not take it to heart, and for that reason, after the fleeting joy of a temporary faith, they relapse; others choke the seed of the Word with the thorns of life's cares and with the pleasures of the world and bring forth no fruits. This our Savior teaches in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13).

Article 10: Conversion as the Work of God

The fact that others who are called through the ministry of the gospel do come and are brought to conversion must not be credited to human effort, as though one distinguishes oneself by free choice from others who are furnished with equal or sufficient grace for faith and conversion (as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains). No, it must be credited to God: just as from eternity God chose his own in Christ, so within time God effectively calls them, grants them faith and repentance, and, having rescued them from the dominion of darkness, brings them into the kingdom of his Son, in order that they may declare the wonderful deeds of the One who called them out of darkness into this marvelous light, and may boast not in themselves, but in the Lord, as apostolic words frequently testify in Scripture.

Article 11: The Holy Spirit's Work in Conversion

Moreover, when God carries out this good pleasure in the elect, or works true conversion in them, God not only sees to it that the gospel is proclaimed to them outwardly, and enlightens their minds powerfully by the Holy Spirit so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but, by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, God also penetrates into the inmost being, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. God infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant. God activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds.

Article 12: Regeneration a Supernatural Work

And this is the regeneration, the new creation, the raising from the dead, and the making alive so clearly proclaimed in the Scriptures, which God works in us without our help. But this certainly does not happen only by outward teaching, by moral persuasion, or by such a way of working that, after God's work is done, it remains in human power whether or not to be reborn or converted. Rather, it is an entirely supernatural work, one that is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing, a marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible work, which is not less than or inferior in power to that of creation or of raising the dead, as Scripture (inspired by the author of this work) teaches. As a result, all those in whose hearts God works in this marvelous way are certainly, unfailingly, and effectively reborn and do actually believe. And then the will, now renewed, is not only activated and motivated by God, but in being activated by God is also itself active. For this reason, people themselves, by that grace which they have received, are also rightly said to believe and to repent.

Article 13: The Incomprehensible Way of Regeneration

In this life believers cannot fully understand the way this work occurs; meanwhile, they rest content with knowing and experiencing that, by this grace of God, they do believe with the heart and love their Savior.

Article 14: The Way God Gives Faith

In this way, therefore, faith is a gift of God, not in the sense that it is offered by God for people to choose, but that it is in actual fact bestowed on them, breathed and infused into them. Nor is it a gift in the sense that God bestows only the potential to believe, but then awaits assent—the act of believing—by human choice; rather, it is a gift in the sense that God who works both willing and acting and, indeed, works all things in all people and produces in them both the will to believe and the belief itself.

Article 15: Responses to God's Grace

God does not owe this grace to anyone. For what could God owe to those who have nothing to give that can be paid back? Indeed, what could God owe to those who have nothing of their own to give but sin and falsehood? Therefore those who receive this grace owe and give eternal thanks to God alone; those who do not receive it either do not care at all about these spiritual things and are satisfied with themselves in their condition, or else in self-assurance foolishly boast about having something which they lack. Furthermore, following the example of the apostles, we are to think and to speak in the most favorable way about those who outwardly profess their faith and better their lives, for the inner chambers of the heart are unknown to us. But for others who have not yet been called, we are to pray to the God who calls things that do not exist as though they did. In no way, however, are we to pride ourselves as better than they, as though we had distinguished ourselves from them.

Article 16: Regeneration's Effect

However, just as by the fall humans did not cease to be human, endowed with intellect and will, and just as sin, which has spread through the whole human race, did not abolish the nature of the human race but distorted and spiritually killed it, so also this divine grace of regeneration does not act in people as if they were blocks and stones; nor does it abolish the will and its properties or coerce a reluctant will by force, but spiritually revives, heals, reforms, and—in a manner at once pleasing and powerful—bends it back.

As a result, a ready and sincere obedience of the Spirit now begins to prevail where before the rebellion and resistance of the flesh were completely dominant. In this the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consists. Thus, if the marvelous Maker of every good thing were not dealing with us, we would have no hope of getting up from our fall by our own free choice, by which we plunged ourselves into ruin when still standing upright.

Article 17: God's Use of Means in Regeneration

Just as the almighty work by which God brings forth and sustains our natural life does not rule out but requires the use of means, by which God, according to his infinite wisdom and goodness, has wished to exercise that divine power, so also the aforementioned supernatural work by which God regenerates us in no way rules out or cancels the use of the gospel, which God in great wisdom has appointed to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul. For this reason, the apostles and the teachers who followed them taught the people in a godly manner about this grace of God, to give God the glory and to humble all pride, and yet did not neglect meanwhile to keep the people, by means of the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and discipline. So even today it is out of the question that the teachers or those taught in the church should presume to test God by separating what God in his good pleasure has wished to be closely joined together. For grace is bestowed through admonitions, and the more readily we perform our duty, the more lustrous the benefit of God working in us usually is, and the better that work advances. To God alone, both for the means and for their saving fruit and effectiveness, all glory is owed forever. Amen.

Rejection of the Errors

Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

I- Who teach that, properly speaking, it cannot be said that original sin in itself is enough to condemn the whole human race or to warrant temporal and eternal punishments.

For they contradict the apostle when he says: "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death passed on to all people because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12); also: "The guilt followed one sin and brought condemnation" (Rom. 5:16); likewise: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

II- Who teach that the spiritual gifts or the good dispositions and virtues such as goodness, holiness, and righteousness could not have resided in the human will at creation, and therefore could not have been separated from the will at the fall.

For this conflicts with the apostle's description of the image of God in Ephesians 4:24, where he portrays the image in terms of righteousness and holiness, which definitely reside in the will.

III- Who teach that in spiritual death the spiritual gifts have not been separated from human will, since the will in itself has never been corrupted but only hindered by the darkness of the mind and the unruliness of the emotions, and since the will is able to exercise its innate free capacity once these hindrances are removed, which is to say, it is able of itself to will or choose whatever good is set before it—or else not to will or choose it.

This is a novel idea and an error and has the effect of elevating the power of free choice, contrary to the words of Jeremiah the prophet: "The heart itself is deceitful above all things and wicked" (Jer. 17:9); and of the words of the apostle: "All of us also lived among them" (the children of disobedience) "at one time in the passions of our flesh, following the will of our flesh and thoughts" (Eph. 2:3).

IV- Who teach that unregenerate humanity is not strictly or totally dead in sin or deprived of all capacity for spiritual good but is able to hunger and thirst for righteousness or life and to offer the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit which is pleasing to God.

For these views are opposed to the plain testimonies of Scripture: "You were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Eph. 2:1, 5); "The

imagination of the thoughts of the human heart is only evil all the time” (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). Besides, to hunger and thirst for deliverance from misery and for life, and to offer God the sacrifice of a broken spirit is characteristic only of the regenerate and of those called blessed (Ps. 51:17; Matt. 5:6).

V- Who teach that corrupt and natural humanity can make such good use of common grace (by which they mean the light of nature) or of the gifts remaining after the fall that they are able thereby gradually to obtain a greater grace—evangelical or saving grace—as well as salvation itself; and that in this way God, for his part, shows himself ready to reveal Christ to all people, since God provides to all, to a sufficient extent and in an effective manner, the means necessary for the revealing of Christ, for faith, and for repentance.

For Scripture, not to mention the experience of all ages, testifies that this is false: “He makes known his words to Jacob, his statutes and his laws to Israel; he has done this for no other nation, and they do not know his laws” (Ps. 147:19-20); “In the past God let all nations go their own way” (Acts 14:16); “They” (Paul and his companions) “were kept by the Holy Spirit from speaking God’s word in Asia”; and “When they had come to Mysia, they tried to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit would not allow them to” (Acts 16:6-7).

VI- Who teach that in the true conversion of men and women new qualities, dispositions, or gifts cannot be infused or poured into their will by God, and indeed that the faith [or believing] by which we first come to conversion and from which we receive the name “believers” is not a quality or gift infused by God, but only a human act, and that it cannot be called a gift except in respect to the power of attaining faith.

For these views contradict the Holy Scriptures, which testify that God does infuse or pour into our hearts the new qualities of faith, obedience, and the experiencing of his love: “I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts” (Jer. 31:33); “I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring” (Isa. 44:3); “The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5). They also conflict with

the continuous practice of the Church, which prays with the prophet: "Convert me, Lord, and I shall be converted" (Jer. 31:18).

VII- Who teach that the grace by which we are converted to God is nothing but a gentle persuasion, or (as others explain it) that the way of God's acting in conversion that is most noble and suited to human nature is that which happens by persuasion, and that nothing prevents this grace of moral persuasion even by itself from making the natural person spiritual; indeed, that God does not produce the assent of the will except in this manner of moral persuasion, and that the effectiveness of God's work by which it surpasses the work of Satan consists in the fact that God promises eternal benefits while Satan promises temporal ones.

For this teaching is entirely Pelagian and contrary to the whole of Scripture, which recognizes besides this persuasion also another, far more effective and divine way in which the Holy Spirit acts in human conversion. As Ezekiel 36:26 puts it: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; and I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. . . ."

VIII- Who teach that God in regenerating people does not bring to bear that power of his omnipotence whereby God may powerfully and unflinching bend the human will to faith and conversion, but that even when God has accomplished all the works of grace which he uses for their conversion, they nevertheless can, and in actual fact often do, so resist God and the Spirit in their intent and will to regenerate them, that they completely thwart their own rebirth; and, indeed, that it remains in their own power whether or not to be reborn.

For this does away with all effective functioning of God's grace in our conversion and subjects the activity of Almighty God to human will; it is contrary to the apostles, who teach that "we believe by virtue of the effective working of God's mighty strength" (Eph. 1:19), and that "God fulfills the undeserved good will of his kindness and the work of faith in us with power" (2 Thess. 1:11), and likewise that "his divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3).

IX- Who teach that grace and free choice are concurrent partial causes which cooperate to initiate conversion, and that grace does not precede—in the order of causality—the effective influence of the will; that is to say, that God does not effectively help the human will to come to conversion before that will itself motivates and determines itself.

For the early church already condemned this doctrine long ago in the Pelagians, on the basis of the words of the apostle: “It does not depend on human willing or running but on God’s mercy” (Rom. 9:16); also: “Who makes you different from anyone else?” and “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor. 4:7); likewise: “It is God who works in you to will and act according to his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

The Fifth Main Point of Doctrine The Perseverance of the Saints

Article 1: The Regenerate Not Entirely Free from Sin

Those people whom God according to his purpose calls into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, God also sets free from the dominion and slavery of sin, though not entirely from the flesh and from the body of sin as long as they are in this life.

Article 2: The Believer’s Reaction to Sins of Weakness

Hence daily sins of weakness arise, and blemishes cling to even the best works of saints, giving them continual cause to humble themselves before God, to flee for refuge to Christ crucified, to put the flesh to death more and more by the Spirit of supplication and by holy exercises of godliness, and to strain toward the goal of perfection, until they are freed from this body of death and reign with the Lamb of God in heaven.

Article 3: God’s Preservation of the Converted

Because of these remnants of sin dwelling in them and also because of the temptations of the world and Satan, those who have been converted could not remain standing in this grace if left to their own resources. But

God is faithful, mercifully strengthening them in the grace once conferred on them and powerfully preserving them in it to the end.

Article 4: The Danger of True Believers' Falling into Serious Sins

The power of God strengthening and preserving true believers in grace is more than a match for the flesh. Yet those converted are not always so activated and motivated by God that in certain specific actions they cannot by their own fault depart from the leading of grace, be led astray by the desires of the flesh, and give in to them. For this reason they must constantly watch and pray that they may not be led into temptations. When they fail to do this, not only can they be carried away by the flesh, the world, and Satan into sins, even serious and outrageous ones, but also by God's just permission they sometimes are so carried away—witness the sad cases, described in Scripture, of David, Peter, and other saints falling into sins.

Article 5: The Effects of Such Serious Sins

By such monstrous sins, however, they greatly offend God, deserve the sentence of death, grieve the Holy Spirit, suspend the exercise of faith, severely wound the conscience, and sometimes lose the awareness of grace for a time—until, after they have returned to the right way by genuine repentance, God's fatherly face again shines upon them.

Article 6: God's Saving Intervention

For God, who is rich in mercy, according to the unchangeable purpose of election does not take the Holy Spirit from his own completely, even when they fall grievously. Neither does God let them fall down so far that they forfeit the grace of adoption and the state of justification, or commit the sin which leads to death (the sin against the Holy Spirit), and plunge themselves, entirely forsaken by God, into eternal ruin.

Article 7: Renewal to Repentance

For, in the first place, God preserves in those saints when they fall the imperishable seed from which they have been born again, lest it perish or

be dislodged. Secondly, by his Word and Spirit God certainly and effectively renews them to repentance so that they have a heartfelt and godly sorrow for the sins they have committed; seek and obtain, through faith and with a contrite heart, forgiveness in the blood of the Mediator; experience again the grace of a reconciled God; through faith adore God's mercies; and from then on more eagerly work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

Article 8: The Certainty of This Preservation

So it is not by their own merits or strength but by God's undeserved mercy that they neither forfeit faith and grace totally nor remain in their downfalls to the end and are lost. With respect to themselves this not only easily could happen, but also undoubtedly would happen; but with respect to God it cannot possibly happen. God's plan cannot be changed; God's promise cannot fail; the calling according to God's purpose cannot be revoked; the merit of Christ as well as his interceding and preserving cannot be nullified; and the sealing of the Holy Spirit can neither be invalidated nor wiped out.

Article 9: The Assurance of This Preservation

Concerning this preservation of those chosen to salvation and concerning the perseverance of true believers in faith, believers themselves can and do become assured in accordance with the measure of their faith. By this faith they firmly believe that they are and always will remain true and living members of the church, and that they have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Article 10: The Ground of This Assurance

Accordingly, this assurance does not derive from some private revelation beyond or outside the Word, but from faith in the promises of God which are very plentifully revealed in the Word for our comfort, from the testimony of "the Holy Spirit testifying with our spirit that we are God's children and heirs" (Rom. 8:16-17), and finally from a serious and holy pursuit of a clear conscience and of good works. If God's chosen ones in this world did not have this well-founded comfort that the victory will be

theirs and this reliable guarantee of eternal glory, they would be of all people most miserable.

Article 11: Doubts Concerning This Assurance

Meanwhile, Scripture testifies that believers have to contend in this life with various doubts of the flesh, and that under severe temptation they do not always experience this full assurance of faith and certainty of perseverance. But God, the Father of all comfort, “does not let them be tempted beyond what they can bear, but with the temptation he also provides a way out” (1 Cor. 10:13), and by the Holy Spirit revives in them the assurance of their perseverance.

Article 12: This Assurance as an Incentive to Godliness

This assurance of perseverance, however, so far from making true believers proud and carnally self-assured, is rather the true root of humility, of childlike respect, of genuine godliness, of endurance in every conflict, of fervent prayers, of steadfastness in crossbearing and in confessing the truth, and of well-founded joy in God. Reflecting on this benefit provides an incentive to a serious and continual practice of thanksgiving and good works, as is evident from the testimonies of Scripture and the examples of the saints.

Article 13: Assurance No Inducement to Carelessness

Neither does the renewed confidence of perseverance produce immorality or lack of concern for godliness in those put back on their feet after a fall, but it produces a much greater concern to observe carefully the ways which the Lord prepared in advance. They observe these ways in order that by walking in them they may maintain the assurance of their perseverance, lest, by their abuse of God’s fatherly goodness, the face of the gracious God (for the godly, looking upon that face is sweeter than life, but its withdrawal is more bitter than death) turn away from them again, with the result that they fall into greater anguish of spirit.

Article 14: God's Use of Means in Perseverance

And, just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the proclamation of the gospel, so God preserves, continues, and completes this work by the hearing and reading of the gospel, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises, and also by the use of the sacraments.

Article 15: Contrasting Reactions to the Teaching of Perseverance

This teaching about the perseverance of true believers and saints, and about their assurance of it—a teaching which God has very richly revealed in the Word for the glory of his name and for the comfort of the godly, and which God impresses on the hearts of believers—is something which the flesh does not understand, Satan hates, the world ridicules, the ignorant and the hypocrites abuse, and the spirits of error attack. The bride of Christ, on the other hand, has always loved this teaching very tenderly and defended it steadfastly as a priceless treasure; and God, against whom no plan can avail and no strength can prevail, will ensure that the church will continue to do this. To this God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen.

Rejection of the Errors Concerning the Teaching of the Perseverance of the Saints

Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

I- Who teach that the perseverance of true believers is not an effect of election or a gift of God produced by Christ's death, but a condition of the new covenant which people, before what they call their "peremptory" election and justification, must fulfill by their free will.

For Holy Scripture testifies that perseverance follows from election and is granted to the chosen by virtue of Christ's death, resurrection, and intercession: "The chosen obtained it; the others were hardened" (Rom. 11:7); likewise, "He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not, along with him, grant us all things? Who will bring

any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised—who also sits at the right hand of God, and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. 8:32-35).

II- Who teach that God does provide believers with sufficient strength to persevere and is ready to preserve this strength in them if they perform their duty, but that even with all those things in place which are necessary to persevere in faith and which God is pleased to use to preserve faith, it still always depends on the choice of human will whether or not to persevere.

For this view is obviously Pelagian; and though it intends to make people free it makes them sacrilegious. It is against the enduring consensus of evangelical teaching which takes from humanity all cause for boasting and ascribes the praise for this benefit only to God’s grace. It is also against the testimony of the apostle: “It is God who keeps us strong to the end, so that we will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8).

III- Who teach that those who truly believe and have been born again not only can forfeit justifying faith as well as grace and salvation totally and to the end, but also in actual fact do often forfeit them and are lost forever.

For this opinion nullifies the very grace of justification and regeneration as well as the continual preservation by Christ, contrary to the plain words of the apostle Paul: “If Christ died for us while we were still sinners, we will therefore much more be saved from God’s wrath through him, since we have now been justified by his blood” (Rom. 5:8-9); and contrary to the apostle John: “No one who is born of God is intent on sin, because God’s seed remains in him, nor can he sin, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9); also contrary to the words of Jesus Christ: “I give eternal life to my sheep, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:28-29).

IV- Who teach that those who truly believe and have been born again can commit the sin that leads to death (the sin against the Holy Spirit).

For the same apostle John, after making mention of those who commit the sin that leads to death and forbidding prayer for them (1 John 5:16-17), immediately adds: "We know that anyone born of God does not commit sin" (that is, that kind of sin), "but the one who was born of God keeps himself safe, and the evil one does not touch him" (v. 18).

V- Who teach that apart from a special revelation no one can have the assurance of future perseverance in this life.

For by this teaching the well-founded consolation of true believers in this life is taken away and the doubting of the Romanists is reintroduced into the church. Holy Scripture, however, in many places derives the assurance not from a special and extraordinary revelation but from the marks peculiar to God's children and from God's completely reliable promises. So especially the apostle Paul: "Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39); and John: "They who obey his commands remain in him and he in them. And this is how we know that he remains in us: by the Spirit he gave us" (1 John 3:24).

VI- Who teach that the teaching of the assurance of perseverance and of salvation is by its very nature and character an opiate of the flesh and is harmful to godliness, good morals, prayer, and other holy exercises, but that, on the contrary, to have doubt about this is praiseworthy.

For these people show that they do not know the effective operation of God's grace and the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and they contradict the apostle John, who asserts the opposite in plain words: "Dear friends, now we are children of God, but what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he is made known, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). Moreover, they are refuted by the examples of the saints in both the Old and the New Testament, who though assured of their perseverance and salvation yet were constant in prayer and other exercises of godliness.

VII- Who teach that the faith of those who believe only temporarily does not differ from justifying and saving faith except in duration alone.

For Christ himself in Matthew 13:20ff. and Luke 8:13ff. clearly defines these further differences between temporary and true believers: he says that the former receive the seed on rocky ground, and the latter receive it in good ground, or a good heart; the former have no root, and the latter are firmly rooted; the former have no fruit, and the latter produce fruit in varying measure, with steadfastness, or perseverance.

VIII- Who teach that it is not absurd that people, after losing their former regeneration, should once again, indeed quite often, be reborn.

For by this teaching they deny the imperishable nature of God's seed by which we are born again, contrary to the testimony of the apostle Peter: "Born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable" (1 Pet. 1:23).

IX- Who teach that Christ nowhere prayed for an unfailing perseverance of believers in faith.

For they contradict Christ himself when he says: "I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:32); and John the gospel writer when he testifies in John 17 that it was not only for the apostles, but also for all those who were to believe by their message that Christ prayed: "Holy Father, preserve them in your name" (v. 11); and "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you preserve them from the evil one" (v. 15).

Conclusion

Rejection of False Accusations

And so this is the clear, simple, and straightforward explanation of the orthodox teaching on the five articles in dispute in the Netherlands, as well as the rejection of the errors by which the Dutch churches have for some time been disturbed. This explanation and rejection the Synod declares to be derived from God's Word and in agreement with the

confessions of the Reformed churches. Hence it clearly appears that those of whom one could hardly expect it have shown no truth, equity, and charity at all in wishing to make the public believe:

that the teaching of the Reformed churches on predestination and on the points associated with it by its very nature and tendency draws the minds of people away from all godliness and religion, is an opiate of the flesh and the devil, and is a stronghold where Satan lies in wait for all people, wounds most of them, and fatally pierces many of them with the arrows of both despair and self-assurance;

that this teaching makes God the author of sin, unjust, a tyrant, and a hypocrite; and is nothing but a refurbished Stoicism, Manicheism, Libertinism, and Turkism*;

that this teaching makes people carnally self-assured, since it persuades them that nothing endangers the salvation of the elect, no matter how they live, so that they may commit the most outrageous crimes with self-assurance; and that on the other hand nothing is of use to the reprobate for salvation even if they have truly performed all the works of the saints;

that this teaching means that God predestined and created, by the bare and unqualified choice of his will, without the least regard or consideration of any sin, the greatest part of the world to eternal condemnation; that in the same manner in which election is the source and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and ungodliness; [Removed]

Therefore this Synod of Dort in the name of the Lord pleads with all who devoutly call on the name of our Savior Jesus Christ to form their judgment about the faith of the Reformed churches, not on the basis of false accusations gathered from here or there, or even on the basis of the personal statements of a number of ancient and modern authorities—statements which are also often either quoted out of context or misquoted and twisted to convey a different meaning—but on the basis of the churches' own official confessions and of the present explanation of the orthodox teaching which has been endorsed by the unanimous consent of the members of the whole Synod, one and all.

Moreover, the Synod earnestly warns the false accusers themselves to consider how heavy a judgment of God awaits those who give false

testimony against so many churches and their confessions, trouble the consciences of the weak, and seek to prejudice the minds of many against the fellowship of true believers.

Finally, this Synod urges all fellow ministers in the gospel of Christ to deal with this teaching in a godly and reverent manner, in the academic institutions as well as in the churches; to do so, both in their speaking and writing, with a view to the glory of God's name, holiness of life, and the comfort of anxious souls; to think and also speak with Scripture according to the analogy of faith; and, finally, to refrain from all those ways of speaking which go beyond the bounds set for us by the genuine sense of the Holy Scriptures and which could give impertinent sophists a just occasion to scoff at the teaching of the Reformed churches or even to bring false accusations against it.

May God's Son Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of God and gives gifts to humanity, sanctify us in the truth, lead to the truth those who err, silence the mouths of those who lay false accusations against sound teaching, and equip faithful ministers of God's Word with a spirit of wisdom and discretion, that all they say may be to the glory of God and the building up of their hearers. Amen.

The Heidelberg Catechism

Part 3

The Heidelberg Catechism, written in 1563, originated in one of the few pockets of Calvinistic faith in the Lutheran and Catholic territories of Germany. Conceived originally as a teaching instrument to promote religious unity in the Palatinate, the catechism soon became a guide for preaching as well. It is a remarkably warm-hearted and personalized confession of faith, eminently deserving of its popularity among Reformed churches to the present day.

Introduction

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) was composed in the city of Heidelberg, Germany, at the request of Elector Frederick III, who ruled the province of the Palatinate from 1559 to 1576. The new catechism was intended as a tool for teaching young people, a guide for preaching in the provincial churches, and a form of confessional unity among the several Protestant factions in the Palatinate. An old tradition credits Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus with being the coauthors of the catechism, but the project was actually the work of a team of ministers and university theologians under the watchful eye of Frederick himself. Ursinus probably served as the primary writer on the team, and Olevianus had a lesser role. The catechism was approved by a synod in Heidelberg in January 1563. A second and third German edition, each with small additions, as well as a Latin translation were published the same year in Heidelberg. The third edition was included in the Palatinate Church Order of November 15, 1563, at which time the catechism was divided into fifty-two sections or Lord's Days, so that one Lord's Day could be explained in an afternoon worship service each Sunday of the year.

The Synod of Dort approved the Heidelberg Catechism in 1619, and it soon became the most ecumenical of the Reformed catechisms and confessions. It has been translated into many European, Asian, and African languages and is still the most widely used and warmly praised catechism of the Reformation period.

Most of the footnoted biblical references in this translation of the catechism were included in the early German and Latin editions, but the precise selection was approved by Synod 1975 of the Christian Reformed Church.

Lord's Day 1

Q & A 1

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

A. That I am not my own,¹ but belong— body and soul, in life and in death—² to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.³

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,⁴
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.⁵

He also watches over me in such a way⁶
that not a hair can fall from my head
without the will of my Father in heaven;⁷
in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.⁸

Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life⁹ and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.¹⁰

¹ [1 Cor. 6:19-20](#)

² [Rom. 14:7-9](#)

³ [1 Cor. 3:23](#); [Titus 2:14](#)

⁴ [1 Pet. 1:18-19](#); [1 John 1:7-9](#); [2:2](#)

⁵ [John 8:34-36](#); [Heb. 2:14-15](#); [1 John 3:1-11](#)

⁶ [John 6:39-40](#); [10:27-30](#); [2 Thess. 3:3](#); [1 Pet. 1:5](#)

⁷ [Matt. 10:29-31](#); [Luke 21:16-18](#)

⁸ [Rom. 8:28](#) ⁹ [Rom. 8:15-16](#); [2 Cor. 1:21-22](#); [5:5](#); [Eph. 1:13-14](#)

¹⁰ [Rom. 8:1-17](#)

Q & A 2

Q. 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;¹ second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery;² third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.³

¹ [Rom. 3:9-10](#); [1 John 1:10](#)

² [John 17:3](#); [Acts 4:12](#); [10:43](#)

³ [Matt. 5:16](#); [Rom. 6:13](#); [Eph. 5:8-10](#); [2 Tim. 2:15](#); [1 Pet. 2:9-10](#)

Part I: Misery

Lord's Day 2

Q & A 3

Q. How do you come to know your misery?

A. The law of God tells me.¹

¹ [Rom. 3:20](#); [7:7-25](#)

Q & A 4

Q. 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.”¹ This is the greatest and first commandment.

“And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’² ‘On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’”

¹ [Deut. 6:5](#)

² [Lev. 19:18](#)

Q & A 5

Q. Can you live up to all this perfectly?

A. No.¹ I have a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbor.²

¹ [Rom. 3:9-20, 23](#); [1 John 1:8, 10](#)

² [Gen. 6:5](#); [Jer. 17:9](#); [Rom. 7:23-24](#); [8:7](#); [Eph. 2:1-3](#); [Titus 3:3](#)

Lord’s Day 3

Q & A 6

Q. Did God create people so wicked and perverse?

A. No. God created them good¹ and in his own image,² that is, in true righteousness and holiness,³ so that they might truly know God their creator,⁴ love him with all their heart, and live with God in eternal happiness, to praise and glorify him.⁵

¹ [Gen. 1:31](#)

² [Gen. 1:26-27](#)

³ [Eph. 4:24](#)

⁴ [Col. 3:10](#)

⁵ [Ps. 8](#)

Q & A 7

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

A. The fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise.¹ This fall has so poisoned our nature² that we are all conceived and born in a sinful condition.³

¹ [Gen. 3](#)

² [Rom. 5:12, 18-19](#)

³ [Ps. 51:5](#)

Q & A 8

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

A. Yes,¹ unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.²

¹ [Gen. 6:5](#); [8:21](#); [Job 14:4](#); [Isa. 53:6](#)

² [John 3:3-5](#)

Lord's Day 4

Q & A 9

Q. 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.¹ They, however, provoked by the devil,² in willful disobedience,³ robbed themselves and all their descendants of these gifts.⁴

¹ [Gen. 1:31](#);

² [Gen. 3:13](#); [John 8:44](#)

³ [Gen. 3:6](#)

⁴ [Rom. 5:12, 18, 19](#)

Q & A 10

Q. 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,¹ having declared:

"Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law."²

¹ [Ex. 34:7](#); [Ps. 5:4-6](#); [Nah. 1:2](#); [Rom. 1:18](#); [Eph. 5:6](#); [Heb. 9:27](#)

² [Gal. 3:10](#); [Deut. 27:26](#)

Q & A 11

Q. But isn't God also merciful?

A. God is certainly merciful,¹ but also just.² God's justice demands that sin, committed against his supreme majesty, be punished with the supreme penalty— eternal punishment of body and soul.³

¹ [Ex. 34:6-7](#); [Ps. 103:8-9](#)

² [Ex. 34:7](#); [Deut. 7:9-11](#); [Ps. 5:4-6](#); [Heb. 10:30-31](#)

³ [Matt. 25:35-46](#)

Part II: Deliverance

Lord's Day 5

Q & A 12

Q. 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 favor?

A. God requires that his justice be satisfied.¹ Therefore the claims of this justice must be paid in full, either by ourselves or by another.²

¹ [Ex. 23:7](#); [Rom. 2:1-11](#)

² [Isa. 53:11](#); [Rom. 8:3-4](#)

Q & A 13

Q. Can we make this payment ourselves?

A. Certainly not. Actually, we increase our debt every day.¹

¹ [Matt. 6:12](#); [Rom. 2:4-5](#)

Q & A 14

Q. 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.¹ Furthermore, no mere creature can bear the weight of God's eternal wrath against sin and deliver others from it.²

¹ [Ezek. 18:4, 20](#); [Heb. 2:14-18](#)

² [Ps. 49:7-9](#); [130:3](#)

Q & A 15

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

A. One who is a true¹ and righteous² human, yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is also true God.³

¹ [Rom. 1:3](#); [1 Cor. 15:21](#); [Heb. 2:17](#)

² [Isa. 53:9](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#); [Heb. 7:26](#)

³ [Isa. 7:14](#); [9:6](#); [Jer. 23:6](#); [John 1:1](#)

Lord's Day 6

Q & A 16

Q. 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;¹ but a sinful human could never pay for others.²

¹ [Rom. 5:12, 15](#); [1 Cor. 15:21](#); [Heb. 2:14-16](#)

² [Heb. 7:26-27](#); [1 Pet. 3:18](#)

Q & A 17

Q. 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.¹

¹ [Isa. 53](#); [John 3:16](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#) ; [Matt. 25:46](#), [Heb. 1](#)

Q & A 18

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

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ,¹ who was given to us to completely deliver us and make us right with God.²

¹ [Matt. 1:21-23](#); [Luke 2:11](#); [1 Tim. 2:5](#)

² [1 Cor. 1:30](#)

Q & A 19

Q. How do you come to know this?

A. The holy gospel tells me. God began to reveal the gospel already in Paradise;¹ later God proclaimed it by the holy patriarchs² and prophets³ and foreshadowed it by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law;⁴ and finally God fulfilled it through his own beloved Son.⁵

¹ [Gen. 3:15](#)

² [Gen. 22:18](#); [49:10](#)

³ [Isa. 53](#); [Jer. 23:5-6](#); [Mic. 7:18-20](#); [Acts 10:43](#); [Heb. 1:1-2](#)

⁴ [Lev. 1-7](#); [John 5:46](#); [Heb. 10:1-10](#)

⁵ [Rom. 10:4](#); [Gal. 4:4-5](#); [Col. 2:17](#)

Lord's Day 7

Q & A 20

Q. 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.¹

¹ [Matt. 7:14](#); [John 3:16, 18, 36](#); [Rom. 11:16-21](#)

Q & A 21

Q. 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;¹ it is also a wholehearted trust,² which the Holy Spirit creates in me³ by the gospel,⁴ that God has freely granted, not only to others but to me also,⁵ forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness, and salvation.⁶ These are gifts of sheer grace, granted solely by Christ's merit.⁷

¹ [John 17:3, 17](#); [Heb. 11:1-3](#); [James 2:19](#)

² [Rom. 4:18-21](#); [5:1](#); [10:10](#); [Heb. 4:14-16](#)

³ [Matt. 16:15-17](#); [John 3:5](#); [Acts 16:14](#)

⁴ [Rom. 1:16](#); [10:17](#); [1 Cor. 1:21](#)

⁵ [Gal. 2:20](#)

⁶ [Rom. 1:17](#); [Heb. 10:10](#)

⁷ [Rom. 3:21-26](#); [Gal. 2:16](#); [Eph. 2:8-10](#)

Q & A 22

Q. What then must a Christian believe?

A. All that is promised us in the gospel,¹ a summary of which is taught us in the articles of our universal and undisputed Christian faith.

¹ [Matt. 28:18-20](#); [John 20:30-31](#)

Q & A 23

Q. 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.)¹² 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.

Lord's Day 8

Q & A 24

Q. 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.

^{12*} The importance and meaning of this phrase in the creed has been debated and misunderstood. We feel that, though there is great mystery and many unanswered questions related to this fact, this phrase should be left in the creed, but must be highlighted and noted. In reference to Christ's descending to the dead, we would want to protect the body of Christ from any misunderstanding by noting what the scriptures make clear:

1- After Christ's death on the cross and after being made alive in the Spirit He proclaimed victory over the spirits who are in prison in accordance with 1 Peter 3:18-19. This was not a preaching of the gospel as to give the spirits imprisoned a second chance, it was an announcement of victory.

2- The day that Jesus died upon the cross He was in paradise, as He says to the thief on the cross. (Luke 23:43)

3- The work of atonement was absolutely completed when He died on the cross, as Jesus says when upon His death He claims that His work is "finished." (John 19:30)

Q & A 25

Q. Since there is only one divine being,¹ why do you speak of three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

A. Because that is how God has revealed himself in his Word:² These three distinct persons are one, true, eternal God.

¹ [Deut. 6:4](#); [1 Cor. 8:4, 6](#)

² [Matt. 3:16-17](#); [28:18-19](#); [Luke 4:18](#) ([Isa. 61:1](#)); [John 14:26](#); [15:26](#); [2 Cor. 13:14](#); [Gal. 4:6](#); [Tit. 3:5-6](#)

God the Father

Lord's Day 9

Q & A 26

Q. What do you believe when you say, *"I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"*?

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them,¹ who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence,² is my God and Father because of Christ the Son.³ I trust God so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul,⁴ and will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends upon me in this sad world.⁵ God is able to do this because he is almighty God⁶ and desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.⁷

¹ [Gen. 1-2](#); [Ex. 20:11](#); [Ps. 33:6](#); [Isa. 44:24](#); [Acts 4:24](#); [14:15](#)

² [Ps. 104](#); [Matt. 6:30](#); [10:29](#); [Eph. 1:11](#)

³ [John 1:12-13](#); [Rom. 8:15-16](#); [Gal. 4:4-7](#); [Eph. 1:5](#)

⁴ [Ps. 55:22](#); [Matt. 6:25-26](#); [Luke 12:22-31](#)

⁵ [Rom. 8:28](#)

⁶ [Gen. 18:14](#); [Rom. 8:31-39](#)

⁷ [Matt. 7:9-11](#)

Lord's Day 10

Q & A 27

Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. The almighty and ever present power of God¹ by which God upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures,² and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty—³ all things, in fact, come to us not by chance⁴ but by his fatherly hand.⁵

¹ [Jer. 23:23-24](#); [Acts 17:24-28](#)

² [Heb. 1:3](#)

³ [Jer. 5:24](#); [Acts 14:15-17/a>](#); [John 9:3](#); [Prov. 22:2](#)

⁴ [Prov. 16:33](#)

⁵ [Matt. 10:29](#)

Q & A 28

Q. How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?

A. We can be patient when things go against us,¹ thankful when things go well,² and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing in creation will separate us from his love.³ For all creatures are so completely in God's hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.⁴

¹ [Job 1:21-22](#); [James 1:3](#)

² [Deut. 8:10](#); [1 Thess. 5:18](#)

³ [Ps. 55:22](#); [Rom. 5:3-5](#); [8:38-39](#)

⁴ [Job 1:12](#); [2:6](#); [Prov. 21:1](#); [Acts 17:24-28](#)

God the Son

Lord's Day 11

Q & A 29

Q. Why is the Son of God called "Jesus," meaning "savior"?

A. Because he saves us from our sins,¹ and because salvation should not be sought and cannot be found in anyone else.²

¹ [Matt. 1:21](#); [Heb. 7:25](#)

² [Isa. 43:11](#); [John 15:5](#); [Acts 4:11-12](#); [1 Tim. 2:5](#)

Q & A 30

Q. Do those who look for their salvation in saints, in themselves, or elsewhere really believe in the only savior Jesus?

A. No. Although they boast of being his, by their actions they deny the only savior, Jesus.¹ Either Jesus is not a perfect savior, or those who in true faith accept this savior have in him all they need for their salvation.²

¹ [1 Cor. 1:12-13](#); [Gal. 5:4](#)

² [Col. 1:19-20](#); [2:10](#); [1 John 1:7](#)

Lord's Day 12

Q & A 31

Q. Why is he called "Christ," meaning "anointed"?

A. Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit¹ to be our chief prophet and teacher² who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our deliverance;³ our only high priest⁴ who has delivered us by the one sacrifice of his body,⁵ and who continually pleads our cause with the Father;⁶ and our eternal king⁷ who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us.⁸

¹ [Luke 3:21-22](#); [4:14-19](#) ([Isa. 61:1](#)); [Heb. 1:9](#) ([Ps. 45:7](#))

² [Acts 3:22](#) ([Deut. 18:15](#))

³ [John 1:18](#); [15:15](#)

⁴ [Heb. 7:17](#) ([Ps. 110:4](#))

⁵ [Heb. 9:12](#); [10:11-14](#)

⁶ [Rom. 8:34](#); [Heb. 9:24](#)

⁷ [Matt. 21:5](#) ([Zech. 9:9](#))

⁸ [Matt. 28:18-20](#); [John 10:28](#); [Rev. 12:10-11](#)

Q & A 32

Q. But why are you called a Christian?

A. Because by faith I am a member of Christ¹ and so I share in his anointing.² I am anointed to confess his name,³ to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks,⁴ to strive with a free conscience against sin and the devil in this life,⁵ and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for eternity.⁶

¹ [1 Cor. 12:12-27](#)

² [Acts 2:17 \(Joel 2:28\)](#); [1 John 2:27](#)

³ [Matt. 10:32](#); [Rom. 10:9-10](#); [Heb. 13:15](#)

⁴ [Rom. 12:1](#); [1 Pet. 2:5, 9](#)

⁵ [Gal. 5:16-17](#); [Eph. 6:11](#); [1 Tim. 1:18-19](#)

⁶ [Matt. 25:34](#); [2 Tim. 2:12](#)

Lord's Day 13

Q & A 33

Q. Why is he called God's "only begotten Son" when we also are God's children?

A. Because Christ alone is the eternal, natural Son of God.¹ We, however, are adopted children of God— adopted by grace through Christ.²

¹ [John 1:1-3, 14, 18](#); [Heb. 1](#)

² [John 1:12](#); [Rom. 8:14-17](#); [Eph. 1:5-6](#)

Q & A 34

Q. Why do you call him "our Lord"?

A. Because— not with gold or silver, but with his precious blood—¹ he has set us free from sin and from the tyranny of the devil,² and has bought us, body and soul, to be his very own.³

¹ [1 Pet. 1:18-19](#)

² [Col. 1:13-14](#); [Heb. 2:14-15](#)

³ [1 Cor. 6:20](#); [1 Tim. 2:5-6](#)

Lord's Day 14

Q & A 35

Q. What does it mean that he “was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary”?

A. That the eternal Son of God, who is and remains true and eternal God,¹ took to himself, through the working of the Holy Spirit,² from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary,³ a truly human nature so that he might also become David’s true descendant,⁴ like his brothers and sisters in every way⁵ except for sin.⁶

¹ [John 1:1](#); [10:30-36](#); [Acts 13:33](#) ([Ps. 2:7](#)); [Col. 1:15-17](#); [1 John 5:20](#)

² [Luke 1:35](#) ³ [Matt. 1:18-23](#); [John 1:14](#); [Gal. 4:4](#); [Heb. 2:14](#)

⁴ [2 Sam. 7:12-16](#); [Ps. 132:11](#); [Matt. 1:1](#); [Rom. 1:3](#)

⁵ [Phil. 2:7](#); [Heb. 2:17](#)

⁶ [Heb. 4:15](#); [7:26-27](#)

Q & A 36

Q. How does the holy conception and birth of Christ benefit you?

A. He is our mediator¹ and, in God’s sight, he covers with his innocence and perfect holiness my sinfulness in which I was conceived.²

¹ [1 Tim. 2:5-6](#); [Heb. 9:13-15](#)

² [Rom. 8:3-4](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#); [Gal. 4:4-5](#); [1 Pet. 1:18-19](#)

Lord's Day 15

Q & A 37

Q. What do you understand by the word "suffered"?

A. That during his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race.¹ This he did in order that, by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice,² he might deliver us, body and soul, from eternal condemnation,³ and gain for us God's grace, righteousness, and eternal life.⁴

¹ [Isa. 53](#); [1 Pet. 2:24](#); [3:18](#)

² [Rom. 3:25](#); [Heb. 10:14](#); [1 John 2:2](#); [4:10](#)

³ [Rom. 8:1-4](#); [Gal. 3:13](#)

⁴ [John 3:16](#); [Rom. 3:24-26](#)

Q & A 38

Q. Why did he suffer "under Pontius Pilate" as judge?

A. So that he, though innocent, might be condemned by an earthly judge,¹

be handed over to the nations as the law foretold as part of the curse for breaking its commands, and so free us from the severe judgment of God that was to fall on us.²

¹ [Luke 23:13-24](#); [John 19:4, 12-16](#)

² [Isa. 53:4-5](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#); [Gal. 3:13](#)

Q & A 39

Q. Is it significant that he was "crucified" instead of dying some other way?

A. Yes. By this I am convinced that he shouldered the curse which lay on me, since death by crucifixion was cursed by God.¹

¹ [Gal. 3:10-13](#) ([Deut. 21:23](#))

Lord's Day 16

Q & A 40

Q. Why did Christ have to suffer death?

A. Because God's justice and truth require it: ¹ nothing else could pay for our sins except the death of the Son of God.²

¹ [Gen. 2:17](#)

² [Rom. 8:3-4](#); [Phil. 2:8](#); [Heb. 2:9](#)

Q & A 41

Q. Why was he "buried"?

A. His burial testifies that he really died.¹

¹ [Isa. 53:9](#); [John 19:38-42](#); [Acts 13:29](#); [1 Cor. 15:3-4](#)

Q & A 42

Q. Since Christ has died for us, why do we still have to die?

A. Our death does not pay the debt of our sins.¹ Rather, it puts an end to our sinning and is our entrance into eternal life.²

¹ [Ps. 49:7](#) ² [John 5:24](#); [Phil. 1:21-23](#); [1 Thess. 5:9-10](#)

Q & A 43

Q. What further benefit do we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross?

A. By Christ's power our old selves are crucified, put to death, and buried with him,¹ so that the evil desires of the flesh may no longer rule us,² but that instead we may offer ourselves as a sacrifice of gratitude to him.³

¹ [Rom. 6:5-11](#); [Col. 2:11-12](#) ² [Rom. 6:12-14](#) ³ [Rom. 12:1](#); [Eph. 5:1-2](#)

Q & A 44

[Removed]

Lord's Day 17

Q & A 45

Q. How does Christ's resurrection benefit us?

A. First, by his resurrection he has overcome death, so that he might make us share in the righteousness he obtained for us by his death.¹ Second, by his power we too are already raised to a new life.² Third, Christ's resurrection is a sure pledge to us of our blessed resurrection.³

¹ [Rom. 4:25](#); [1 Cor. 15:16-20](#); [1 Pet. 1:3-5](#) ² [Rom. 6:5-11](#); [Eph. 2:4-6](#); [Col. 3:1-4](#) ³ [Rom. 8:11](#); [1 Cor. 15:12-23](#); [Phil. 3:20-21](#)

Lord's Day 18

Q & A 46

Q. What do you mean by saying, "He ascended to heaven"?

A. That Christ, while his disciples watched, was taken up from the earth into heaven¹ and remains there on our behalf² until he comes again to judge the living and the dead.³ ¹ [Luke 24:50-51](#); [Acts 1:9-11](#) ² [Rom. 8:34](#); [Eph. 4:8-10](#); [Heb. 7:23-25](#); [9:24](#) ³ [Acts 1:11](#)

Q & A 47

Q. But isn't Christ with us until the end of the world as he promised us?¹

A. Christ is true human and true God. In his human nature Christ is not now on earth;² but in his divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit he is never absent from us.³

¹ [Matt. 28:20](#) ² [Acts 1:9-11](#); [3:19-21](#) ³ [Matt. 28:18-20](#); [John 14:16-19](#)

Q & A 48

Q. If his humanity is not present wherever his divinity is, then aren't the two natures of Christ separated from each other?

A. Certainly not. Since divinity is not limited and is present everywhere,¹ it is evident that Christ's divinity is surely beyond the bounds of the humanity that has been taken on, but at the same time his divinity is in and remains personally united to his humanity.²

¹ [Jer. 23:23-24](#); [Acts 7:48-49](#) ([Isa. 66:1](#)) ² [John 1:14](#); [3:13](#); [Col. 2:9](#)

Q & A 49

Q. How does Christ's ascension to heaven benefit us?

A. First, he is our advocate in heaven in the presence of his Father.¹ Second, we have our own flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that Christ our head will also take us, his members, up to himself.² Third, he sends his Spirit to us on earth as a corresponding pledge.³ By the Spirit's power we seek not earthly things but the things above, where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand.⁴

¹ [Rom. 8:34](#); [1 John 2:1](#) ² [John 14:2](#); [17:24](#); [Eph. 2:4-6](#) ³ [John 14:16](#); [2 Cor. 1:21-22](#); [5:5](#) ⁴ [Col. 3:1-4](#)

Lord's Day 19

Q & A 50

Q. Why the next words: "and is seated at the right hand of God"?

A. Because Christ ascended to heaven to show there that he is head of his church,¹ the one through whom the Father rules all things.²

¹ [Eph. 1:20-23](#); [Col. 1:18](#) ² [Matt. 28:18](#); [John 5:22-23](#)

Q & A 51

Q. 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.¹ Second, by his power he defends us and keeps us safe from all enemies.²

¹ [Acts 2:33](#); [Eph. 4:7-12](#) ² [Ps. 110:1-2](#); [John 10:27-30](#); [Rev. 19:11-16](#)

Q & A 52

Q. 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.¹ 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.²

¹ [Luke 21:28](#); [Rom. 8:22-25](#); [Phil. 3:20-21](#); [Tit. 2:13-14](#) ² [Matt. 25:31-46](#); [2 Thess. 1:6-10](#)

God the Holy Spirit

Lord's Day 20

Q & A 53

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

A. First, that the Spirit, with the Father and the Son, is eternal God.¹ Second, that the Spirit is given also to me,² so that, through true faith, he makes me share in Christ and all his benefits,³ comforts me,⁴ and will remain with me forever.⁵

¹ [Gen. 1:1-2](#); [Matt. 28:19](#); [Acts 5:3-4](#) ² [1 Cor. 6:19](#); [2 Cor. 1:21-22](#); [Gal. 4:6](#)

³ [Gal. 3:14](#) ⁴ [John 15:26](#); [Acts 9:31](#) ⁵ [John 14:16-17](#); [1 Pet. 4:14](#)

Lord's Day 21

Q & A 54

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

A. I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word,¹ out of the entire human race,² from the beginning of the world to its end,³ gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life⁴ and united in true faith.⁵ And of this community I am⁶ and always will be⁷ a living member.

¹ [John 10:14-16](#); [Acts 20:28](#); [Rom. 10:14-17](#); [Col. 1:18](#) ² [Gen. 26:3b-4](#); [Rev. 5:9](#) ³ [Isa. 59:21](#); [1 Cor. 11:26](#) ⁴ [Matt. 16:18](#); [John 10:28-30](#); [Rom. 8:28-30](#); [Eph. 1:3-14](#) ⁵ [Acts 2:42-47](#); [Eph. 4:1-6](#) ⁶ [1 John 3:14, 19-21](#) ⁷ [John 10:27-28](#); [1 Cor. 1:4-9](#); [1 Pet. 1:3-5](#)

Q & A 55

Q. 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.¹ 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.²

¹ [Rom. 8:32](#); [1 Cor. 6:17](#); [12:4-7, 12-13](#); [1 John 1:3](#) ² [Rom. 12:4-8](#); [1 Cor. 12:20-27](#); [13:1-7](#); [Phil. 2:4-8](#)

Q & A 56

Q. 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 sins¹ or my sinful nature which I need to struggle against all my life.² Rather, by grace God grants me the righteousness of Christ to free me forever from judgment.³

¹ [Ps. 103:3-4, 10, 12](#); [Mic. 7:18-19](#); [2 Cor. 5:18-21](#); [1 John 1:7](#); [2:2](#)

² [Rom. 7:21-25](#) ³ [John 3:17-18](#); [Rom. 8:1-2](#)

Lord's Day 22

Q & A 57

Q. 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,¹ but also my very flesh will be raised by the power of Christ, reunited with my soul, and made like Christ's glorious body.²

¹ [Luke 23:43](#); [Phil. 1:21-23](#) ² [1 Cor. 15:20, 42-46, 54](#); [Phil. 3:21](#); [1 John 3:2](#)

Q & A 58

Q. How does the article concerning "life everlasting" comfort you?

A. Even as I already now experience in my heart the beginning of eternal joy,¹ 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.²

¹ [Rom. 14:17](#) ² [John 17:3](#); [1 Cor. 2:9](#)

Lord's Day 23

Q & A 59

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

A. In Christ I am righteous before God and heir to life everlasting.¹

¹ [John 3:36](#); [Rom. 1:17](#) ([Hab. 2:4](#)); [Rom. 5:1-2](#)

Q & A 60

Q. How are you righteous before God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.¹ Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments, of never having kept any of them,² and of still being inclined toward all evil,³ nevertheless, without any merit of my own,⁴ out of sheer grace,⁵ God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ,⁶ 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.⁷ All I need to do is receive this gift with a believing heart.⁸

(Note: the idea of "receive" must be viewed in context of the rest of the doctrines laid out in our confession.)

¹ [Rom. 3:21-28](#); [Gal. 2:16](#); [Eph. 2:8-9](#); [Phil 3:8-11](#) ² [Rom. 3:9-10](#)

³ [Rom. 7:23](#) ⁴ [Tit. 3:4-5](#) ⁵ [Rom. 3:24](#); [Eph. 2:8](#) ⁶ [Rom. 4:3-5](#) ([Gen. 15:6](#)); [2 Cor. 5:17-19](#); [1 John 2:1-2](#) ⁷ [Rom. 4:24-25](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#) ⁸ [John 3:18](#); [Acts 16:30-31](#)

Q & A 61

Q. 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,¹ and because I can accept this righteousness and make it mine in no other way than through faith.²

¹ [1 Cor. 1:30-31](#) ² [Rom. 10:10](#); [1 John 5:10-12](#)

Lord's Day 24

Q & A 62

Q. 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.¹ But even our best works in this life are imperfect and stained with sin.²

¹ [Rom. 3:20](#); [Gal. 3:10](#) ([Deut. 27:26](#)) ² [Isa. 64:6](#)

Q & A 63

Q. How can our good works be said to merit nothing when God promises to reward them in this life and the next?¹

A. This reward is not earned; it is a gift of grace.²

¹ [Matt. 5:12](#); [Heb. 11:6](#) ² [Luke 17:10](#); [2 Tim. 4:7-8](#)

Q & A 64

Q. 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.¹

¹ [Luke 6:43-45](#); [John 15:5](#)

The Holy Sacraments

Lord's Day 25

Q & A 65

Q. 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 hearts¹ by the preaching of the holy gospel,² and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments.³

¹ [John 3:5](#); [1 Cor. 2:10-14](#); [Eph. 2:8](#) ² [Rom. 10:17](#); [1 Pet. 1:23-25](#)

³ [Matt. 28:19-20](#); [1 Cor. 10:16](#)

Q & A 66

Q. 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.¹ 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.²

¹ [Gen. 17:11](#); [Deut. 30:6](#); [Rom. 4:11](#) ² [Matt. 26:27-28](#); [Acts 2:38](#);
[Heb. 10:10](#)

Q & A 67

Q. 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.¹

¹ [Rom. 6:3](#); [1 Cor. 11:26](#); [Gal. 3:27](#)

Q & A 68

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

A. Two: holy baptism and the holy supper.¹

¹ [Matt. 28:19-20](#); [1 Cor. 11:23-26](#)

Holy Baptism

Lord's Day 26

Q & A 69

Q. 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 washing¹ 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.²

¹ [Acts 2:38](#) ² [Matt. 3:11](#); [Rom. 6:3-10](#); [1 Pet. 3:21](#)

Q & A 70

Q. 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.¹ 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.²

¹ [Zech. 13:1](#); [Eph. 1:7-8](#); [Heb. 12:24](#); [1 Pet. 1:2](#); [Rev. 1:5](#)

² [Ezek. 36:25-27](#); [John 3:5-8](#); [Rom. 6:4](#); [1 Cor. 6:11](#); [Col. 2:11-12](#)

Q & A 71

Q. 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."¹ "The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned."² This promise is repeated when Scripture calls baptism "the water of rebirth"³ and the washing away of sins.⁴

(note: This answer makes no statement about the timing of the washing by the blood and Spirit in relation to the time of water baptism.)

¹ [Matt. 28:19](#) ² [Mark 16:16](#) ³ [Tit. 3:5](#) ⁴ [Acts 22:16](#)

Lord's Day 27

Q & A 72

Q. 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.¹

¹ [Matt. 3:11](#); [1 Pet. 3:21](#); [1 John 1:7](#)

Q & A 73

Q. 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.¹ 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.²

¹ [1 Cor. 6:11](#); [Rev. 1:5](#); [7:14](#) ² [Acts 2:38](#); [Rom. 6:3-4](#); [Gal. 3:27](#)

Q & A 74

[removed]

The Holy Supper of Jesus Christ

Lord's Day 28

Q & A 75

Q. 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:¹

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.

¹ [Matt. 26:26-28](#); [Mark 14:22-24](#); [Luke 22:19-20](#); [1 Cor. 11:23-25](#)

Q & A 76

Q. What does it mean to eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink his poured-out blood?

A. It means to accept with a believing heart the entire suffering and death of Christ and thereby to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.¹ But it means more. Through the Holy Spirit, who lives both in Christ and in us, we are united more and more to Christ's blessed body.²

(note: "united more and more" we do not take to mean "become more and more a believer" or "become more and more really Christ's", but that we experience the blessings of that union more and more.)

And so, although he is in heaven³ and we are on earth, we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.⁴ And we forever live on and are governed by one Spirit, as the members of our body are by one soul.⁵

¹ [John 6:35, 40, 50-54](#) ² [John 6:55-56](#); [1 Cor. 12:13](#) ³ [Acts 1:9-11](#); [1 Cor. 11:26](#); [Col. 3:1](#) ⁴ [1 Cor. 6:15-17](#); [Eph. 5:29-30](#); [1 John 4:13](#) ⁵ [John 6:56-58](#); [15:1-6](#); [Eph. 4:15-16](#); [1 John 3:24](#)

Q & A 77

Q. Where does Christ promise to nourish and refresh believers with his body and blood as surely as they eat this broken bread and drink this cup?

A. In the institution of the Lord's Supper:

"The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is [broken] for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."¹*

This promise is repeated by Paul in these words:

"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."²

¹ [1 Cor. 11:23-26](#) ² [1 Cor. 10:16-17](#)

*The word “broken” does not appear in the NRSV text, but it was present in the original German of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Lord’s Day 29

Q & A 78

Q. Do the bread and wine become the real body and blood of Christ?

A. No. Just as the water of baptism is not changed into Christ’s blood and does not itself wash away sins but is simply a divine sign and assurance¹ of these things, so too the holy bread of the Lord’s Supper does not become the actual body of Christ,² even though it is called the body of Christ³ in keeping with the nature and language of sacraments.⁴

¹ [Eph. 5:26](#); [Tit. 3:5](#) ² [Matt. 26:26-29](#) ³ [1 Cor. 10:16-17](#); [11:26-28](#)

⁴ [Gen. 17:10-11](#); [Ex. 12:11, 13](#); [1 Cor. 10:1-4](#)

Q & A 79

Q. Why then does Christ call the bread his body and the cup his blood, or the new covenant in his blood, and Paul use the words, a sharing in Christ’s body and blood?

A. Christ has good reason for these words. He wants to teach us that just as bread and wine nourish the temporal life, so too his crucified body and poured-out blood are the true food and drink of our souls for eternal life.¹ But more important, he wants to assure us, by this visible sign and pledge, that we, through the Holy Spirit’s work, share in his true body and blood as surely as our mouths receive these holy signs in his remembrance,² and that all of his suffering and obedience are as definitely ours as if we personally had suffered and made satisfaction for

our sins.³

¹ [John 6:51, 55](#) ² [1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:26](#) ³ [Rom. 6:5-11](#)

Lord's Day 30

Q & A 80*

Q. How does the Lord's Supper differ from the Roman Catholic Mass?

A. The Lord's Supper declares to us that all our sins are completely forgiven through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which he himself accomplished on the cross once for all.¹ It also declares to us that the Holy Spirit grafts us into Christ,² who with his true body is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father³ where he wants us to worship him.⁴

[But the Mass teaches that the living and the dead do not have their sins forgiven through the suffering of Christ unless Christ is still offered for them daily by the priests. It also teaches that Christ is bodily present under the form of bread and wine where Christ is therefore to be worshiped. Thus the Mass is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and a condemnable idolatry.]**

¹ [John 19:30; Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 25-26; 10:10-18](#) ² [1 Cor. 6:17; 10:16-17](#)

³ [Acts 7:55-56; Heb. 1:3; 8:1](#) ⁴ [Matt. 6:20-21; John 4:21-24; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1-3](#)

***Q&A 80** was altogether absent from the first edition of the catechism but was present in a shorter form in the second edition. The translation here given is of the expanded text of the third edition.

**In response to a mandate from Synod 1998, the Christian Reformed Church's Interchurch Relations Committee conducted a study of Q&A 80 and the Roman Catholic Mass. Based on this study, Synod 2004 declared that "Q&A 80 can no longer be held in its current form as part of our

confession.” Synod 2006 directed that Q&A 80 remain in the CRC’s text of the Heidelberg Catechism but that the last three paragraphs be placed in brackets to indicate that they do not accurately reflect the official teaching and practice of today’s Roman Catholic Church and are no longer confessionally binding on members of the CRC.

The Reformed Church in America retains the original full text, choosing to recognize that the catechism was written within a historical context which may not accurately describe the Roman Catholic Church’s current stance.

Q & A 81

Q. Who should come to the Lord’s table?

A. Those who are displeased with themselves because of their sins, but who nevertheless trust that their sins are pardoned and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and to lead a better life. Hypocrites and those who are unrepentant, however, eat and drink judgment on themselves.¹

¹ [1 Cor. 10:19-22](#); [11:26-32](#)

Q & A 82

Q. Should those be admitted to the Lord’s Supper who show by what they profess and how they live that they are unbelieving and ungodly?

A. No, that would dishonor God’s covenant and bring down God’s wrath upon the entire congregation.¹ Therefore, according to the instruction of Christ and his apostles, the Christian church is duty-bound to exclude such people, by the official use of the keys of the kingdom, until they reform their lives.

¹ [1 Cor. 11:17-32](#); [Ps. 50:14-16](#); [Isa. 1:11-17](#)

Lord's Day 31

Q & A 83

Q. What are the keys of the kingdom?

A. The preaching of the holy gospel and Christian discipline toward repentance. Both of them open the kingdom of heaven to believers and close it to unbelievers.¹

¹ [Matt. 16:19](#); [John 20:22-23](#)

Q & A 84

Q. How does preaching the holy gospel open and close the kingdom of heaven?

A. According to the command of Christ:

The kingdom of heaven is opened by proclaiming and publicly declaring to all believers, each and every one, that, as often as they accept the gospel promise in true faith, God, because of Christ's merit, truly forgives all their sins. The kingdom of heaven is closed, however, by proclaiming and publicly declaring to unbelievers and hypocrites that, as long as they do not repent, the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them. God's judgment, both in this life and in the life to come, is based on this gospel testimony.¹

¹ [Matt. 16:19](#); [John 3:31-36](#); [20:21-23](#)

Q & A 85

Q. How is the kingdom of heaven closed and opened by Christian discipline?

A. According to the command of Christ: Those who, though called Christians, profess unchristian teachings or live unchristian lives, and who after repeated personal and loving admonitions, refuse to abandon their errors and evil ways, and who after being reported to the church, that is, to those ordained by the church for that purpose, fail to respond also to the church's admonitions— such persons the church excludes from the Christian community by withholding the sacraments from them, and God also excludes them from the kingdom of Christ.¹ Such persons, when promising and demonstrating genuine reform, are received again as members of Christ and of his church.²

¹ [Matt. 18:15-20](#); [1 Cor. 5:3-5, 11-13](#); [2 Thess. 3:14-15](#) ² [Luke 15:20-24](#); [2 Cor. 2:6-11](#)

Part III: Gratitude

Lord's Day 32

Q & A 86

Q. Since we have been delivered from our misery by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why then should we do good works?

A. Because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, is also restoring us by his Spirit into his image, so that with our whole lives we may show that we are thankful to God for his benefits,¹ so that he may be praised through us,² so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits,³ and so that by our godly living our neighbors may be won over to Christ.⁴

(note: this is not to say that our neighbors are "saved" by our godly living, which would contradict 83-85, but that we join God in showing common grace which is a powerful apologetic, and should produce repentance in the unbeliever and opportunity for us to share the gospel, not in the sense that the gospel cannot be shared unless this is done, but in that we are given another chance to share what can always be shared.)

¹ [Rom. 6:13](#); [12:1-2](#); [1 Pet. 2:5-10](#) ² [Matt. 5:16](#); [1 Cor. 6:19-20](#)

³ [Matt. 7:17-18](#); [Gal. 5:22-24](#); [2 Pet. 1:10-11](#) ⁴ [Matt. 5:14-16](#); [Rom. 14:17-19](#); [1 Pet. 2:12](#); [3:1-2](#)

Q & A 87

Q. Can those be saved who do not turn to God from their ungrateful and unrepentant ways?

A. By no means. Scripture tells us that no unchaste person, no idolater, adulterer, thief, no covetous person, no drunkard, slanderer, robber, or the like will inherit the kingdom of God.¹

¹ [1 Cor. 6:9-10](#); [Gal. 5:19-21](#); [Eph. 5:1-20](#); [1 John 3:14](#)

Lord's Day 33

Q & A 88

Q. What is involved in genuine repentance or conversion?

A. Two things: the dying-away of the old self, and the rising-to-life of the new.¹

¹ [Rom. 6:1-11](#); [2 Cor. 5:17](#); [Eph. 4:22-24](#); [Col. 3:5-10](#)

Q & A 89

Q. What is the dying-away of the old self?

A. To be genuinely sorry for sin and more and more to hate and run away from it.¹

¹ [Ps. 51:3-4, 17](#); [Joel 2:12-13](#); [Rom. 8:12-13](#); [2 Cor. 7:10](#)

Q & A 90

Q. What is the rising-to-life of the new self?

A. Wholehearted joy in God through Christ¹ and a love and delight to live according to the will of God by doing every kind of good work.²

¹ [Ps. 51:8, 12](#); [Isa. 57:15](#); [Rom. 5:1](#); [14:17](#) ² [Rom. 6:10-11](#); [Gal. 2:20](#)

Q & A 91

Q. What are good works?

A. Only those which are done out of true faith,¹ conform to God's law,² and are done for God's glory;³ and not those based on our own opinion or human tradition.⁴

¹ [John 15:5](#); [Heb. 11:6](#) ² [Lev. 18:4](#); [1 Sam. 15:22](#); [Eph. 2:10](#) ³ [1 Cor. 10:31](#)

⁴ [Deut. 12:32](#); [Isa. 29:13](#); [Ezek. 20:18-19](#); [Matt. 15:7-9](#)

The Ten Commandments

Lord's Day 34

Q & A 92

Q. What is God's law?

A. God spoke all these words:

- **THE FIRST COMMANDMENT**

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me."

- **THE SECOND COMMANDMENT**

"You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments."

- **THE THIRD COMMANDMENT**

"You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name."

- **THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT**

"Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work— you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the

Sabbath day and consecrated it.”

- **THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT**

“Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving to you.”

- **THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT**

“You shall not murder.”

- **THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT**

“You shall not commit adultery.”

- **THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT**

“You shall not steal.”

- **THE NINTH COMMANDMENT**

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

- **THE TENTH COMMANDMENT**

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”¹

¹ [Ex. 20:1-17](#); [Deut. 5:6-21](#)

Q & A 93

Q. How are these commandments divided?

A. Into two tables. The first has four commandments,

teaching us how we ought to live in relation to God. The second has six commandments, teaching us what we owe our neighbor.¹

¹ [Matt. 22:37-39](#)

Q & A 94

Q. What does the Lord require in the first commandment?

A. That I, not wanting to endanger my own salvation, avoid and shun all idolatry,¹ sorcery, superstitious rites,² and prayer to saints or to other creatures.³ That I rightly know the only true God,⁴ trust him alone,⁵ and look to God for every good thing⁶ humbly⁷ and patiently,⁸ and love,⁹ fear,¹⁰ and honor¹¹ God with all my heart. In short, that I give up anything rather than go against God's will in any way.¹²

¹ [1 Cor. 6:9-10](#); [10:5-14](#); [1 John 5:21](#) ² [Lev. 19:31](#); [Deut. 18:9-12](#)

³ [Matt. 4:10](#); [Rev. 19:10](#); [22:8-9](#) ⁴ [John 17:3](#)

⁵ [Jer. 17:5](#), ⁷ [Ps. 104:27-28](#); [James 1:17](#) ⁷ [1 Pet. 5:5-6](#) ⁸ [Col. 1:11](#); [Heb. 10:36](#) ⁹ [Matt. 22:37](#) ([Deut. 6:5](#)) ¹⁰ [Prov. 9:10](#); [1 Pet. 1:17](#) ¹¹ [Matt. 4:10](#) ([Deut. 6:13](#)) ¹² [Matt. 5:29-30](#); [10:37-39](#)

Q & A 95

Q. What is idolatry?

A. Idolatry is having or inventing something in which one trusts in place of or alongside of the only true God, who has revealed himself in the Word.¹

¹ [1 Chron. 16:26](#); [Gal. 4:8-9](#); [Eph. 5:5](#); [Phil. 3:19](#)

Lord's Day 35

Q & A 96

Q. What is God's will for us in the second commandment?

A. That we in no way make any image of God¹ nor worship him in any other way than has been commanded in God's Word.²

¹ [Deut. 4:15-19](#); [Isa. 40:18-25](#); [Acts 17:29](#); [Rom. 1:22-23](#)

² [Lev. 10:1-7](#); [1 Sam. 15:22-23](#); [John 4:23-24](#)

Q & A 97

Q. May we then not make any image at all?

A. God can not and may not be visibly portrayed in any way. Although creatures may be portrayed, yet God forbids making or having such images if one's intention is to worship them or to serve God through them.¹

¹ [Ex. 34:13-14, 17](#); [2 Kings 18:4-5](#)

Q & A 98

Q. But may not images be permitted in churches in place of books for the unlearned?

A. No, we should not try to be wiser than God. God wants the Christian community instructed by the living preaching of his Word—¹ not by idols that cannot even talk.²

¹ [Rom. 10:14-15, 17](#); [2 Tim. 3:16-17](#); [2 Pet. 1:19](#)

² [Jer. 10:8](#); [Hab. 2:18-20](#)

Lord's Day 36

Q & A 99

Q. What is the aim of the third commandment?

A. That we neither blaspheme nor misuse the name of God by cursing,¹ perjury,² or unnecessary oaths,³ nor share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders.⁴ In summary, we should use the holy name of God only with reverence and awe,⁵ so that we may properly confess God,⁶ pray to God,⁷ and glorify God in all our words and works.⁸

¹ [Lev. 24:10-17](#) ² [Lev. 19:12](#) ³ [Matt. 5:37](#); [James 5:12](#) ⁴ [Lev. 5:1](#); [Prov. 29:24](#) ⁵ [Ps. 99:1-5](#); [Jer. 4:2](#) ⁶ [Matt. 10:32-33](#); [Rom. 10:9-10](#)
⁷ [Ps. 50:14-15](#); [1 Tim. 2:8](#) ⁸ [Col. 3:17](#)

Q & A 100

Q. Is blasphemy of God's name by swearing and cursing really such serious sin that God is angry also with those who do not do all they can to help prevent and forbid it?

A. Yes, indeed.¹ No sin is greater or provokes God's wrath more than blaspheming his name. That is why God commanded it to be punished with death.²

¹ [Lev. 5:1](#) ² [Lev. 24:10-17](#)

Lord's Day 37

Q & A 101

Q. But may we swear an oath in God's name if we do it reverently?

A. Yes, when the government demands it, or when necessity requires it, in order to maintain and promote truth and trustworthiness for God's glory and our neighbor's good. Such oaths are grounded in God's Word¹ and were rightly used by the people of God in the Old and New Testaments.²

¹ [Deut. 6:13; 10:20; Jer. 4:1-2; Heb. 6:16](#) ² [Gen. 21:24; Josh. 9:15; 1 Kings 1:29-30; Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23](#)

Q & A 102

Q. May we also swear by saints or other creatures?

A. No. A legitimate oath means calling upon God as the only one who knows my heart to witness to my truthfulness and to punish me if I swear falsely.¹ No creature is worthy of such honor.²

¹ [Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:23](#) ² [Matt. 5:34-37; 23:16-22; James 5:12](#)

Lord's Day 38

Q & A 103

Q. What is God's will for you in the fourth commandment?

A. First, that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained,¹ and that, especially on the festive day of rest, I diligently attend the assembly of God's people² to learn what God's Word teaches,³ to participate in the sacraments,⁴ to pray to God publicly,⁵ and to bring Christian offerings for the poor.⁶

Second, that every day of my life I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through his Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.⁷

¹ [Deut. 6:4-9, 20-25](#); [1 Cor. 9:13-14](#); [2 Tim. 2:2](#); [3:13-17](#); [Tit. 1:5](#)
² [Deut. 12:5-12](#); [Ps. 40:9-10](#); [68:26](#); [Acts 2:42-47](#); [Heb. 10:23-25](#)
³ [Rom. 10:14-17](#); [1 Cor. 14:31-32](#); [1 Tim. 4:13](#) ⁴ [1 Cor. 11:23-25](#)
⁵ [Col. 3:16](#); [1 Tim. 2:1](#) ⁶ [Ps. 50:14](#); [1 Cor. 16:2](#); [2 Cor. 8 & 9](#) ⁷ [Isa. 66:23](#);
[Heb. 4:9-11](#)

Lord's Day 39

Q & A 104

Q. What is God's will for you in the fifth commandment?

A. That I honor, love, and be loyal to my father and mother and all those in authority over me; that I submit myself with proper obedience to all their good teaching and discipline;¹ and also that I be patient with their failings—²for through them God chooses to rule us.³

¹ [Ex. 21:17](#); [Prov. 1:8](#); [4:1](#); [Rom. 13:1-2](#); [Eph. 5:21-22](#); [6:1-9](#); [Col. 3:18-4:1](#)

² [Prov. 20:20](#); [23:22](#); [1 Pet. 2:18](#) ³ [Matt. 22:21](#); [Rom. 13:1-8](#); [Eph. 6:1-9](#);
[Col. 3:18-21](#)

Lord's Day 40

Q & A 105

Q. What is God's will for you in the sixth commandment?

A. I am not to belittle, hate, insult, or kill my neighbor— not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds— and I am not to be party to this in others;¹ rather, I am to put

away all desire for revenge.² I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself either.³ Prevention of murder is also why government is armed with the sword.⁴

¹ [Gen. 9:6](#); [Lev. 19:17-18](#); [Matt. 5:21-22](#); [26:52](#) ² [Prov. 25:21-22](#); [Matt. 18:35](#); [Rom. 12:19](#); [Eph. 4:26](#) ³ [Matt. 4:7](#); [26:52](#); [Rom. 13:11-14](#)

⁴ [Gen. 9:6](#); [Ex. 21:14](#); [Rom. 13:4](#)

Q & A 106

Q. Does this commandment refer only to murder?

A. By forbidding murder God teaches us that he hates the root of murder: envy, hatred, anger, vindictiveness.¹ In God's sight all such are disguised forms of murder.²

¹ [Prov. 14:30](#); [Rom. 1:29](#); [12:19](#); [Gal. 5:19-21](#); [1 John 2:9-11](#) ² [1 John 3:15](#)

Q & A 107

Q. Is it enough then that we do not murder our neighbor in any such way?

A. No. By condemning envy, hatred, and anger God wants us to love our neighbors as ourselves,¹ to be patient, peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly toward them,² to protect them from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies.³

¹ [Matt. 7:12](#); [22:39](#); [Rom. 12:10](#) ² [Matt. 5:3-12](#); [Luke 6:36](#); [Rom. 12:10, 18](#); [Gal. 6:1-2](#); [Eph. 4:2](#); [Col. 3:12](#); [1 Pet. 3:8](#) ³ [Ex. 23:4-5](#); [Matt. 5:44-45](#); [Rom. 12:20-21](#) ([Prov. 25:21-22](#))

Lord's Day 41

Q & A 108

Q. What does the seventh commandment teach us?

A. That God condemns all unchastity,¹ and that therefore we should thoroughly detest it² and live decent and chaste lives,³ within or outside of the holy state of marriage.

¹ [Lev. 18:30](#); [Eph. 5:3-5](#) ² [Jude 22-23](#) ³ [1 Cor. 7:1-9](#); [1 Thess. 4:3-8](#); [Heb. 13:4](#)

Q & A 109

Q. Does God, in this commandment, forbid only such scandalous sins as adultery?

A. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul, and God wants both to be kept clean and holy. That is why God forbids all unchaste actions, looks, talk, thoughts, or desires,¹ and whatever may incite someone to them.²

¹ [Matt. 5:27-29](#); [1 Cor. 6:18-20](#); [Eph. 5:3-4](#) ² [1 Cor. 15:33](#); [Eph. 5:18](#)

Lord's Day 42

Q & A 110

Q. What does God forbid in the eighth commandment?

A. God forbids not only outright theft and robbery, punishable by law.¹ But in God's sight theft also includes all scheming and swindling in order to get our neighbor's goods for ourselves, whether by force or

means that appear legitimate,² such as inaccurate measurements of weight, size, or volume; fraudulent merchandising; counterfeit money; excessive interest; or any other means forbidden by God.³ In addition God forbids all greed⁴ and pointless squandering of his gifts.⁵

¹ [Ex. 22:1](#); [1 Cor. 5:9-10](#); [6:9-10](#) ² [Mic. 6:9-11](#); [Luke 3:14](#); [James 5:1-6](#)

³ [Deut. 25:13-16](#); [Ps. 15:5](#); [Prov. 11:1](#); [12:22](#); [Ezek. 45:9-12](#); [Luke 6:35](#)

⁴ [Luke 12:15](#); [Eph. 5:5](#) ⁵ [Prov. 21:20](#); [23:20-21](#); [Luke 16:10-13](#)

Q & A 111

Q. What does God require of you in this commandment?

A. That I do whatever I can for my neighbor's good, that I treat others as I would like them to treat me, and that I work faithfully so that I may share with those in need.¹

¹ [Isa. 58:5-10](#); [Matt. 7:12](#); [Gal. 6:9-10](#); [Eph. 4:28](#)

Lord's Day 43

Q & A 112

Q. What is the aim of the ninth commandment?

A. That I never give false testimony against anyone, twist no one's words, not gossip or slander, nor join in condemning anyone rashly or without a hearing.¹ Rather, in court and everywhere else, I should avoid lying and deceit of every kind; these are the very devices the devil uses, and they would call down on me God's intense wrath.² I should love the truth, speak it candidly, and openly acknowledge it.³ And I should do what I can to guard and advance my neighbor's good name.⁴

¹ [Ps. 15](#); [Prov. 19:5](#); [Matt. 7:1](#); [Luke 6:37](#); [Rom. 1:28-32](#) ² [Lev. 19:11-12](#); [Prov. 12:22](#); [13:5](#); [John 8:44](#); [Rev. 21:8a](#) ³ [1 Cor. 13:6](#); [Eph. 4:25](#)
⁴ [1 Pet. 3:8-9](#); [4:8](#)

Lord's Day 44

Q & A 113

Q. What is the aim of the tenth commandment?

A. That not even the slightest desire or thought contrary to any one of God's commandments should ever arise in our hearts. Rather, with all our hearts we should always hate sin and take pleasure in whatever is right.¹

¹ [Ps. 19:7-14](#); [139:23-24](#); [Rom. 7:7-8](#)

Q & A 114

Q. But can those converted to God obey these commandments perfectly?

A. No. In this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience.¹ Nevertheless, with all seriousness of purpose, they do begin to live according to all, not only some, of God's commandments.²

¹ [Eccles. 7:20](#); [Rom. 7:14-15](#); [1 Cor. 13:9](#); [1 John 1:8-10](#) ² [Ps. 1:1-2](#); [Rom. 7:22-25](#); [Phil. 3:12-16](#)

Q & A 115

Q. Since no one in this life can obey the Ten Commandments perfectly, why does God want them preached so pointedly?

A. First, so that the longer we live the more we may come to know our sinfulness and the more eagerly look to Christ for forgiveness of sins and

righteousness.¹ Second, so that we may never stop striving, and never stop praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, to be renewed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection.²

¹ [Ps. 32:5](#); [Rom. 3:19-26](#); [7:7, 24-25](#); [1 John 1:9](#) ² [1 Cor. 9:24](#); [Phil. 3:12-14](#); [1 John 3:1-3](#)

The Lord's Prayer

Lord's Day 45

Q & A 116

Q. Why do Christians need to pray?

A. Because prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us.¹ And also because God gives his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who pray continually and groan inwardly, asking God for these gifts and thanking God for them.²

¹ [Ps. 50:14-15](#); [116:12-19](#); [1 Thess. 5:16-18](#) ² [Matt. 7:7-8](#); [Luke 11:9-13](#)

Q & A 117

Q. What is the kind of prayer that pleases God and that he listens to?

A. First, we must pray from the heart to no other than the one true God, revealed to us in his Word, asking for everything God has commanded us to ask for.¹ Second, we must fully recognize our need and misery, so that we humble ourselves in God's majestic presence.² Third, we must rest on this unshakable foundation: even though we do not deserve it, God will surely listen to our prayer because of Christ our Lord. That is what God promised us in his Word.³

¹ [Ps. 145:18-20](#); [John 4:22-24](#); [Rom. 8:26-27](#); [James 1:5](#); [1 John 5:14-15](#)

² [2 Chron. 7:14](#); [Ps. 2:11](#); [34:18](#); [62:8](#); [Isa. 66:2](#); [Rev. 4](#) ³ [Dan. 9:17-19](#);
[Matt. 7:8](#); [John 14:13-14](#); [16:23](#); [Rom. 10:13](#); [James 1:6](#)

Q & A 118

Q. What did God command us to pray for?

A. Everything we need, spiritually and physically,¹ as embraced in the prayer Christ our Lord himself taught us.

¹ [James 1:17](#); [Matt. 6:33](#)

Q & A 119

Q. What is this prayer?

A. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen.^{1*}

¹ [Matt. 6:9-13](#); [Luke 11:2-4](#)

*Earlier and better manuscripts of Matthew 6 omit the words "For the kingdom and . . . Amen."

Lord's Day 46

Q & A 120

Q. Why did Christ command us to call God "our Father"?

A. To awaken in us at the very beginning of our prayer what should be basic to our prayer— a childlike reverence and trust that through Christ God has become our Father, and that just as our parents do not refuse us the things of this life, even less will God our Father refuse to give us what we ask in faith.¹

¹ [Matt. 7:9-11](#); [Luke 11:11-13](#)

Q & A 121

Q. Why the words “in heaven”?

A. These words teach us not to think of God’s heavenly majesty as something earthly,¹ and to expect everything needed for body and soul from God’s almighty power.²

¹ [Jer. 23:23-24](#); [Acts 17:24-25](#) ² [Matt. 6:25-34](#); [Rom. 8:31-32](#)

Lord’s Day 47

Q & A 122

Q. What does the first petition mean?

A. “Hallowed be your name” means: Help us to truly know you,¹ to honor, glorify, and praise you for all your works and for all that shines forth from them: your almighty power, wisdom, kindness, justice, mercy, and truth.² And it means, Help us to direct all our living— what we think, say, and do— so that your name will never be blasphemed because of us but always honored and praised.³

¹ [Jer. 9:23-24](#); [31:33-34](#); [Matt. 16:17](#); [John 17:3](#) ² [Ex. 34:5-8](#); [Ps. 145](#); [Jer. 32:16-20](#); [Luke 1:46-55, 68-75](#); [Rom. 11:33-36](#) ³ [Ps. 115:1](#); [Matt. 5:16](#)

Lord's Day 48

Q & A 123

Q. What does the second petition mean?

A. "Your kingdom come" means: Rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to you.¹ Preserve your church and make it grow.² Destroy the devil's work; destroy every force which revolts against you and every conspiracy against your holy Word.³ Do this until your kingdom fully comes, when you will be all in all.⁴

¹ [Ps. 119:5, 105; 143:10; Matt. 6:33](#) ² [Ps. 122:6-9; Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:42-47](#) ³ [Rom. 16:20; 1 John 3:8](#) ⁴ [Rom. 8:22-23; 1 Cor. 15:28; Rev. 22:17, 20](#)

Lord's Day 49

Q & A 124

Q. What does the third petition mean?

A. "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" means: Help us and all people to reject our own wills and to obey your will without any back talk. Your will alone is good.¹ Help us one and all to carry out the work we are called to,² as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven.³

¹ [Matt. 7:21; 16:24-26; Luke 22:42; Rom. 12:1-2; Tit. 2:11-12](#)

² [1 Cor. 7:17-24; Eph. 6:5-9](#) ³ [Ps. 103:20-21](#)

Lord's Day 50

Q & A 125

Q. What does the fourth petition mean?

A. "Give us this day our daily bread" means: Do take care of all our physical needs¹ so that we come to know that you are the only source of everything good,² and that neither our work and worry nor your gifts can do us any good without your blessing.³ And so help us to give up our trust in creatures and trust in you alone.⁴

¹ [Ps. 104:27-30](#); [145:15-16](#); [Matt. 6:25-34](#) ² [Acts 14:17](#); [17:25](#); [James 1:17](#)

³ [Deut. 8:3](#); [Ps. 37:16](#); [127:1-2](#); [1 Cor. 15:58](#) ⁴ [Ps. 55:22](#); [62](#); [146](#); [Jer. 17:5-8](#); [Heb. 13:5-6](#)

Lord's Day 51

Q & A 126

Q. What does the fifth petition mean?

A. "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" means: Because of Christ's blood, do not hold against us, poor sinners that we are, any of the sins we do or the evil that constantly clings to us.¹ Forgive us just as we are fully determined, as evidence of your grace in us, to forgive our neighbors.²

¹ [Ps. 51:1-7](#); [143:2](#); [Rom. 8:1](#); [1 John 2:1-2](#) ² [Matt. 6:14-15](#); [18:21-35](#)

Lord's Day 52

Q & A 127

Q. What does the sixth petition mean?

A. "And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one" means: By ourselves we are too weak to hold our own even for a moment.¹ And our sworn enemies—the devil,² the world,³ and our own flesh—⁴ never stop attacking us. And so, Lord, uphold us and make us strong with the strength of your Holy Spirit, so that we may not go down to defeat in this spiritual struggle,⁵ but may firmly resist our enemies until we finally win the complete victory.⁶

¹ [Ps. 103:14-16](#); [John 15:1-5](#) ² [2 Cor. 11:14](#); [Eph. 6:10-13](#); [1 Pet. 5:](#)

³ [John 15:18-21](#) ⁴ [Rom. 7:23](#); [Gal. 5:17](#) ⁵ [Matt. 10:19-20](#); [26:41](#);

[Mark 13:33](#); [Rom. 5:3-5](#) ⁶ [1 Cor. 10:13](#); [1 Thess. 3:13](#); [5:23](#)

Q & A 128

Q. What does your conclusion to this prayer mean?

A. For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever" means: We have made all these petitions of you because, as our all-powerful king, you are both willing and able to give us all that is good;¹ and because your holy name, and not we ourselves, should receive all the praise, forever.²

¹ [Rom. 10:11-13](#); [2 Pet. 2:9](#) ² [Ps. 115:1](#); [John 14:13](#)

Q & A 129

Q. What does that little word "Amen" express?

A. "Amen" means: This shall truly and surely be! It is even more sure that God listens to my prayer than that I really desire what I pray for.¹

¹ [Isa. 65:24](#); [2 Cor. 1:20](#); [2 Tim. 2:13](#)