

MY ONLY COMFORT

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM FOR
DEVOTIONAL READING


P U B L I S H I N G
P.O.BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

FOREWORD

THERE ARE MANY THINGS MY PARENTS DID RIGHT and many things the churches of my childhood did well. Among them was introducing me to catechisms. And I was not merely introduced to catechisms but expected to memorize them. During my teenage years, Tuesday night was “catechism night” and I, along with my peers, would go to church to receive instruction in the Heidelberg Catechism from the pastor. We were also expected to recite a question and answer and to proceed sequentially until we had committed the whole thing to memory.

I did not appreciate these classes when I was young and most certainly did not appreciate being told to memorize the catechism. But, as Solomon says, “folly is bound up in the heart of a child” (Prov. 22:15). My parents and pastors knew better. They knew that lessons learned early are not soon forgotten. They knew the importance of laying a firm foundation of doctrine. And they knew the Heidelberg Catechism would provide that.

I am thankful for their wisdom, thankful for their perseverance, and thankful for the catechism. I'm thankful also for Amanda Martin, who had the vision to reframe it as she has done in this volume. Though the content is identical, the format is fresh and interesting. Rather than reading as a long series of questions and answers, it now reads as a kind of poetic devotional. And it works well! I trust and I pray that this will spark a new wave of interest and help a new generation to both read and benefit from it.

Tim Challies
www.challies.com

INTRODUCTION

WRITTEN CHIEFLY BY THE GERMAN REFORMER Zacharius Ursinus (1534–83) and refined by fellow theologians and church leaders, the Heidelberg Catechism was designed to instruct, and its theology is deep and systematic. Its authors intended that it be presented by pastors to their congregations, with explanatory sermons, each Lord's Day throughout the year, and so they divided it into fifty-two sections. Within this format, 129 questions and answers move from the fall to redemption to conversion to the Christian life while following the wording of the Apostles' Creed, Ten Commandments, and Lord's Prayer. Succinct without being terse, the Catechism answers the kinds of questions you encounter in Bible studies (Why did our Savior need to be both God and man?) as well as the kinds of questions you worry about in the middle of the night (What is your only comfort in the face of death?).

In that way, the Catechism is both personal and devotional. It rewards close attention and

consideration. Its answers are rich with insights that bless daily life and thought.

Although its Q&A format is useful for instruction, I wondered how our perceptions of the Catechism might shift if it was written not as a kindly interrogation but as a meditation. I took out the questions and adjusted the answers so they could stand on their own. I consulted the proof texts and included one for each Lord's Day reading in order to give Scripture, the Catechism's foundation, the last word.

If you've memorized some form of the Catechism, you'll find some different phrasing in this edition: in preparing this book, I consulted and interwove two 1800s translations, making minor edits for clarity. Stripping away the questions from the Catechism makes the familiar unfamiliar again, and that can be a useful exercise. If you have never experienced this Catechism, in part or in whole, I hope the devotional format and beautiful binding of this edition welcomes you into its richness. As you read and ponder the Catechism's time-tested wisdom, may it encourage your heart with true and lasting comfort.

Amanda Martin
P&R Publishing

LORD'S DAY 1

My only comfort in life and in death is that I,
 with body and soul,
 both in life and in death,
 am not my own,
but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ,
 who with his precious blood
has fully satisfied for all my sins,
and delivered me from all the
 power of the devil;
and so preserves me that,
 without the will of my heavenly Father,
 not a hair can fall from my head—
yea, that all things must work together
 for my salvation;
and therefore,
 by his Holy Spirit,
he also assures me of eternal life,
and makes me sincerely willing and ready
 henceforth to live unto him.

Enjoying this comfort,
I may live and die happy
by knowing three things:
First, the greatness of my sin and misery.
Second, how I am delivered
from all my sins and misery.
Third, how I am to express my
gratitude to God for such deliverance.

*If we live, we live to the Lord,
and if we die, we die to the Lord.
So then, whether we live or whether we die,
we are the Lord's.*

ROMANS 14:8

THE FIRST PART

Of the Misery of Man



LORD'S DAY 2

I know my misery
out of the law of God.

Christ teaches us the requirements
of the law of God briefly,

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God
with all thy heart,
and with all thy soul,
and with all thy mind,
and with all thy strength.

This is the first and the great commandment;
and the second is like unto it:

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

On these two commandments
hang all the law and the prophets.”*

I cannot keep the law perfectly,
for I am prone by nature
to hate God and my neighbors.

* Matthew 22:37–40; Mark 12:30–31

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.

I JOHN 1:8

LORD'S DAY 3

God did not create man wicked and perverse,
but he created man good
and after his own image
—that is, in righteousness
and true holiness—
that he might
rightly know God his Creator,
and heartily love him,
and live with him in eternal happiness,
to glorify him and praise him.

The depravity of human nature proceeds
from the fall and disobedience
of our first parents,
Adam and Eve,
in paradise,
hence our nature became so corrupt that
we are all conceived and born in sin.

We are indeed so corrupt that
we are wholly incapable of doing any good,
and prone to all evil,
unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.

*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water
and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*

JOHN 3:5