

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 8: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, QUESTIONS 24-25

Question 24: How are these articles [of the Apostles' Creed] divided? **Into three parts: the first is of God the Father and our creation; the second, of God the Son and our redemption; the third, of God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.**

We can see how the Apostles' Creed is based on the truth of the Trinity, the most basic truth of all (Matt. 28:19). "The Creed is divided into three parts, one each for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Jones, *Study Helps*, 55). These three Persons are indivisibly One God, having in common all the divine attributes (characteristics). Each Person is equally "eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good" (*Belgic Confession*, article 1). All three Persons create, redeem, and sanctify, but in a *different* order and manner of working. God the Father made all things *through* His Son [John 1:3] and *by* His Holy Spirit [Gen. 1:2; Psalm 33:6; 104:30]. "The work of creation is attributed to the Father...because He is the fountain of Divinity, and of all divine works, and so of creation [John 5:17, 26]; ...Redemption is attributed to the Son...because the Son is that Person who immediately [*most directly*] performs the work of redemption; for the Son alone was made a ransom for our sins [Mark 10:45]"; and "sanctification is attributed to the Holy Spirit," because He "is that Person who immediately [*most directly*] sanctifies us [1 Pet. 1:2]" (Ursinus, *Commentary*, 120). For example, "God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts" (Galatians 4:6).

Question 25: Since there is but one Divine Being, why do you speak of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? **Because God has so revealed Himself in His Word, that these three distinct persons are the one, true, eternal God.**

The term *Trinity* ("three-in-one") is used by the Christian Church to summarize the biblical truth that there is "one only God, who is the one single essence, in which are three Persons, really, truly and eternally distinct" (*Belgic Confession*, article 8). It is simply a matter of allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture. There are Scriptures which reveal that "the Lord our God, the Lord is **one**" (Deut. 6:4; cf. Isaiah 45:21; 1 Cor. 8:4); and there are Scriptures which reveal **three** distinct divine Persons. For example, "when our Lord was baptized in Jordan, the voice of the Father was heard, saying, *This is My beloved Son* (Matt. 3:17); the Son was seen in the water, and the Holy Spirit appeared in the shape of a dove" (*Belgic*, article 9). Jesus promised His disciples: "when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, *the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me*" (John 15:26). The church's benediction is: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen" (2 Cor. 13:14). The prayers of believers are Trinitarian: "through [*Christ*] we have access by one *Spirit* to the *Father*" (Ephesians 2:18). God is **one in essence, three in Person**. People often object to using theological terms like *essence* and *person*. "Indeed, I could wish they were buried, if only among all men this faith was agreed on: that Father and Son and Holy Spirit are one God, yet the Son is not the Father, nor the Spirit the Son, but that they are differentiated by a peculiar quality" (John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.5).

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REFORMATION 500 WEEK 4: MARTIN LUTHER'S 1521-1525

When Martin Luther refused to recant at the Diet of Worms, he sealed “his doom as a heretic. German nobles quickly surrounded him and led him safely from the hall,” and “when it became clear that the German nobles would not hand Luther over to the papal authorities, Charles V placed him under the imperial ban. Luther could be hunted down and killed by anyone – a ruling that he lived under for the rest of his life. Further, anyone harboring Luther would also fall under the same condemnation. Frederick the Wise [Luther’s prince and friend] fully predicted the outcome at Worms. He arranged for Luther to be kidnapped and taken to one of his castles” (Nichols, 42).

Luther was taken to the castle, “the Wartburg, whose wooded rocky heights overlooked the pretty little town of Eisenach. Here Luther stayed for ten months [from 1521 to March 1522] while the storm quieted” (Kuiper, 181). Writing occupied most of his time. “He translated the Bible into the German language, the language of his people. In the Roman Catholic Church the Bible was studied only by the church leaders and scholars. Luther held that every man has the right and the duty to read and study the Bible for himself” (Kuiper, 184).

When Luther returned to Wittenberg in March, 1522, “his breach with Rome was both irreparable and final. Now Luther had to oversee the establishment of a new church” (Nichols, 45). “Luther retained the idea that there is only one, true, visible Church. He did not think of himself and his followers as having left the Church. The Romanists were the ones who had departed from the New Testament Church. Luther did not feel that he had established a new church. All that he had done was to reform the Church that had become deformed” (Kuiper, 185).

Luther “instituted numerous reforms, including congregational singing, the use of German in addition to Latin, and a new-found emphasis on the sermon” Nichols, 47). We still sing his most famous hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is our God.”

“Luther challenged the celibacy of the priesthood and monks,” and backed it up “by marrying priests and by assisting nuns in escaping the convents at great personal risk. On one occasion, he assisted twelve nuns,” who “escaped on a wagon containing barrels used to store herring” (Nichols, 48). Luther later married one of these nuns – Katherina Von Bora – on June 13, 1525. They lived happily ever after.

Two months before his wedding, Luther’s reform efforts were taken in a fanatical direction in the Peasants’ War. “German peasants found inspiration in both the life and writings of Martin Luther. As Luther threw off the shackles of the Medieval Roman church’s oppressive theology, so the peasants sought to rid themselves of the oppressive economic and political structures of the Medieval political world” (Nichols, 47). At first, “Luther was in sympathy with them. But when under the leadership of fanatics they began to kill and destroy, Luther turned against them and urged the government to put down their uprising with a firm hand. From that moment the lower classes turned their backs upon Luther and the Reformation” (Kuiper, 237). While Luther was finishing (in his opinion) his greatest work, *The Bondage of the Will*, another radical movement was taking place in Switzerland, led by a group who felt that Zwingli’s reforms were not going fast enough or far enough. Stay tuned.

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