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“In 1512, when Luther was still unknown, Professor Jacques Lefevre of the Sorbonne in Paris published a Latin translation of, and commentary on, the epistles of Paul. It is God who saves ‘by grace alone,’ said the professor. One of his students, Guillaume Farel, saw with the eyes of faith what his teacher was telling him.

“Many others in France rediscovered the truths of God’s Word. Churches were changed. Margaret, the king’s sister, was converted. The new faith spread throughout the country. As in all lands, this raised fierce opposition. Lefevre’s writings were condemned in 1525, as were the writings of Luther and a little book by Margaret. Anyone found possessing such writings could expect to pay dearly. Into such a Paris came John Calvin in 1523 [to study at the university].

“Calvin drove himself to master all his studies: the classical languages, logic, the writings of the Church Father’s, law. At his father’s wish, Calvin changed from the study of theology to that of law. On his father’s death, Calvin decided to practice neither, but to live the life of scholar in Paris.

“Late in 1533 Nicholas Cop, now rector of the University of Paris, made his annual All Saints’ Day address. The speech sounded like the ideas of Erasmus and Luther. It was rumored that Cop had written it with the advice of Calvin. Both had to flee for their lives. John Calvin escaped through a back window while some friends talked to the bailiffs in the front” (above quotes taken from Kuiper, 189-190).

In the preface to his commentary on Psalms, Calvin writes of his conversion. “At first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of the papacy, that it was extremely difficult to drag me from the depths of the mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame... Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less zeal.”

In his *Letter to Sadoleto*, Calvin says that prior to his conversion he was “overwhelmed by the consciousness of sin, just as Luther was... He tells us that his conversion was not, as has sometimes been maintained, a cold intellectual decision, but an act in the depths of a heart which trusts. He shows us his struggles, his hesitation in leaving the Church of his childhood, and his repentance with tears.... But especially do we feel in these pages this grip of God on his life, this impossibility of resisting the heavenly vision, this ‘I can do no other’ which is indeed the hallmark of Reformation piety” (John Cadier, *The Man God Mastered*, 41-42).

“Calvin was hunted from city to city. He often used assumed names such as Charles d’Esperville or Martianus Lucanius. Everywhere he went he taught small groups in secret places. A new torture was devised about this time, a device to lift the victim in and out of the fire, roasting him slowly instead of burning him all at once. Nowhere in France was a Protestant safe” (Kuiper, 190-191).

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## REFORMATION 500 WEEK 14: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, QUESTION 35-36

**Question 35:** WHAT IS THE MEANING OF [ARTICLE 3 OF THE APOSTLES CREED]

CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY? **That the eternal Son of God, who is and continues true and eternal God, took upon Himself the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Spirit; so that He might also be the true seed of David, like unto His brethren in all things, except for sin.**

The eternal Son of God took upon Himself the very nature of man (soul and body) – He “became flesh” (John 1:14) – without ceasing to be the eternal Son of God. The Son of God cannot change. “I am the LORD, I do not change” (Mal. 3:6).

To understand this better, we need to know the difference between **person** and **nature**. God is *three* divine *persons* (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in *one* divine *nature*. A human being is one person in one nature. The person of the Son of God united Himself to a human *nature* (soul and body), *not* a human *person*. “Hence it is correct to say: the person took the nature, ...but we cannot correctly say, the person took a person, (Ursinus, 210). As we confess in the *Belgic Confession*, “the **Person** of the Son of God is inseparably united and connected with the human **nature**; so that there are not two Sons of God, nor two Persons, but two natures [divine and human] united in one single Person... Wherefore we confess that He is *very God* and *very man*” (article 19). Thus, “the two natures subsist in the single person of Christ, without confusion, without change, indivisible, and inseparable, as it is expressed in the Chalcedonian creed” (Ursinus, 211). In His eternal divine nature, the Son of God could say, “Before Abraham was I AM” (John 8:58); and in His finite human nature, the Son of God could say, “I thirst” (John 19:28). **One Person** spoke according to His **two natures**.

The Son of God became a man in the womb of the Virgin Mary, by the power of the Holy Spirit, just as the angel said: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:20). Mary was a pregnant virgin, just as the prophet had foretold (Matt. 1:23). Jesus’ human nature was taken from the very substance of Mary – of her flesh and blood – in much the same way that our flesh and blood is received from our mother (Heb. 2:14). Just as Joseph and Mary descended from David, so did Christ (Rom. 1:3). But in Christ’s case the Holy Spirit miraculously caused His human nature to be conceived without the seed and substance of a man, so His human nature was formed from His mother alone. Thus, “in all things He had to be made like His brethren” (Heb. 2:17). Thus, He had a real human nature, with all its weaknesses, “except for sin” (Heb. 4:15).

**Question 36:** WHAT BENEFIT DO YOU RECEIVE FROM THE HOLY CONCEPTION AND BIRTH OF CHRIST? **That He is our Mediator, and with His innocence and perfect holiness covers, in the sight of God, my sin, wherein I was conceived.**

The eternal Son of God became a sinless Man to be a true Mediator (God-Man) to reconcile God and sinful man. It will be explained later in Question 60, how our sin in which we were conceived can be *covered*, that is *forgiven*, on the basis of Christ’s perfect holiness. For now, we declare what David declared in Psalm 32:1: “Blessed is he whose transgression is *forgiven*, whose sin is *covered*.”

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