

## REFORMATION 500 WEEK 16: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, QUESTION 40-44

[No Reformation History this week due to the length of the Catechism explanation]

**Question 40: WHY WAS IT NECESSARY FOR CHRIST TO SUFFER DEATH? Because the justice and truth of God required that satisfaction for our sins could be made in no other way than by the death of the Son of God.**

God is truthful and just. He said to our first parents Adam and Eve that they would die if they disobeyed His commandment (Gen. 2:16-17). The fact that they did not die instantly after they sinned shows that God in His mercy had planned to send His Son to suffer the death that all sinners deserve, and thereby to satisfy the justice of God. The eternal Son of God “died according to His human nature only...for the divine nature...cannot die” (Ursinus, 215). The Son of God in His humanity suffered the agonizing and painful separation of His human soul and body by God’s severe wrath.

**Question 41: WHY WAS HE BURIED? To show thereby that He was really dead.**

Jesus was buried, not only to fulfill the prophecy “He made His grave with the wicked” (Isaiah 53:9), but also so that we would not be able to doubt His death, on which our salvation depended. Pilate even posted a guard to make sure that Jesus’ tomb was sealed so His disciples could not steal His body (Matt. 27:64-66).

**Question 42: SINCE, THEN, CHRIST DIED FOR US, WHY MUST WE ALSO DIE? Our death is not a satisfaction for our sin, but only a dying to sin and an entering into eternal life.**

Since Christ died in our place, and has fully satisfied for all our sins, why do we still have to die? It is because when we are united to Christ by true faith, we do not receive all the benefits of His death *all at once*. We are justified but not perfectly sanctified in this life; and we do not receive our resurrected bodies until Christ returns (Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:23). We have to wait until He returns to receive *the perfect enjoyment of all the benefits* of His death, including the elimination of death itself (1 Cor. 15:26, 54). But since Christ died for us, our physical death is not a satisfaction or punishment for our sin. Rather, our physical death puts an end to our sinning and ushers our soul into the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in heaven (2 Cor. 5:8; Heb. 12:22-24).

**Question 43: WHAT FURTHER BENEFIT DO WE RECEIVE FROM THE SACRIFICE AND DEATH OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS? That by His power our old man [our old sinful nature] is with Him crucified, slain, and buried; so that the evil lusts of the flesh may no more reign in us, but that we may offer ourselves unto Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving.**

When we are united to Christ by true faith, the first benefit we receive from Christ’s death is justification, which means we are forgiven the eternal punishment of sin (Rom. 8:1, 33). “The justice of God demands that the sinner should not be punished twice. And as God has punished our sins in Christ, He will not, therefore, punish the same in us” (Ursinus, 227). We also receive the further benefit of sanctification,

which means that by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit we are set free from the enslaving power of our old sinful nature by receiving a brand new holy nature – “a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). This does not mean we no longer have our old sinful nature, but it does mean we are no longer *slaves* to our old sinful nature. We have a new nature that desires to please God out of thankfulness for salvation. Thus, “our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Rom. 6:6). “He, therefore, who boasts of having applied to himself by faith the death of Christ, and yet has no desire to live a holy and godly life... gives conclusive evidence that the truth is not in him; for all those who are justified are willing and ready to do those things which are pleasing to God” (Ursinus, 227).

**Question 44: WHY IS IT ADDED: HE DESCENDED INTO HELL? That in my greatest temptations I may be assured that Christ my Lord, by His inexpressible anguish, pains, and terrors, which He suffered in His soul on the cross and before, has redeemed me from the anguish and torment of hell.**

In the Apostles’ Creed, the phrase “He descended into hell,” *follows* the words “crucified, dead and buried.” “The Roman Catholic Church takes it to mean that Christ literally went to hell to suffer for three days and then took the Old Testament believers, who had died, to heaven. The Lutherans say that Jesus’ soul went to hell not to suffer but to proclaim His victory over His enemies” (Norman Jones, *Study Helps*, 96).

The biblical view is that the term *hell* is used not only to refer to the place of the damned, but also to signify the most extreme distress and anguish. “The pains of *death* surrounded me, and the pangs of *hell* laid hold of me; I found *trouble* and *sorrow*” (Psalm 116:3). Therefore, the phrase, “He descended to hell,” refers to the torments that Christ suffered in His soul *before He died*. *After He died*, His soul did not go to hell, but His soul went to *Paradise* (which is *heaven* – see 2 Cor. 12:2-4). Christ told the believing thief on the cross: “*Today* you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43); and right before He breathed His last breath, He said to his Father, “into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46). “The soul of Christ, after His death, was, therefore, in the hands of His Father in Paradise, and not in hell” (Ursinus, 229). There was no need for Christ to suffer in hell, because His suffering to redeem His elect was *finished* when He died on the cross. Before His last breath He proclaimed, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Plus, OT believers “were not in hell; therefore, they could not be liberated from that place” (Ursinus, 228). There was no need for Christ to go to hell to proclaim victory over His enemies, because the Bible says He did that by His resurrection and ascension (Eph. 4:8; 1 Pet. 3:21-22).

The reason why “He descended into hell” *follows* “crucified, dead, and buried,” is to explain that He not only suffered bodily, but “He also suffered in soul the most extreme torments, and hellish agonies such as all the ungodly shall forever endure. The chief, and heaviest part of the sufferings of Christ is, therefore, correctly placed last, according to the order in the Creed; for it proceeds from the pains of the body to those of the soul” (Ursinus, 232). When Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” He was suffering the inexpressible anguish, pains, and terrors of hell. Therefore, He has redeemed all believers from the anguish and torment of hell!

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