

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 19: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, QUESTION 50-52

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

Question 50: WHY IS IT ADDED: “AND SITS AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER”?
Because Christ ascended into heaven for this end, that He might there appear as the Head of His Church, by whom the Father governs all things.

God raised Jesus “from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:20). To sit at the right hand is a metaphor borrowed from the ancient custom of kings who placed at their right side those whom they wished to honor and to whom they entrusted certain departments of government (cf. 1 Kings 2:19). God has entrusted to Jesus Christ “*all* authority...in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). “He is that King by whom God governs all things” (Ursinus, 255). The “Son was always that person by whom the Father governed all things from the beginning, as He also created all things by Him [John 1:1-3] Christ was always at the right hand of God according to His Divinity, by virtue of His appointment to the office of mediator which was made from everlasting [Psalm 2:7-9].” In fact, He “commenced to execute, and has executed the office of mediator from the very beginning of the world [Gen. 3:15]” (Ursinus, 257).

At His ascension, Christ was seated according to His human nature, which then received a dignity and glory it did not have before His ascension (Luke 24:26; Phil. 2:8-9). Before His ascension, His glory as the Son of God was concealed by His humanity and humiliation (cf. Matt. 17:1-8). When Christ ascended into heaven, He laid aside His humiliation, and there was an open declaration of the glory He had with the Father “before the world was” (John 17:5). Christ has a universal kingdom over all things (Eph. 1:20-23). He is “the ruler over the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5). “He is the head of the whole world by way of dominion, but a head to the church by way of union and special influence (John 17:2)... The Church is His special care and charge. He rules the world for its good” (Flavel, *The Mystery of Providence*, 27).

Question 51: WHAT DOES THIS GLORY OF CHRIST, OUR HEAD, PROFIT US? **First, that by His Holy Spirit He pours out the heavenly gifts upon us, His members; then, that by His power He defends and preserves us against all enemies.**

On the Day of Pentecost, ten days after Christ’s ascension, Peter told the Jews that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was proof that Jesus had been enthroned as King of God’s promised kingdom (Acts 2:33-36). “The benefits of the kingdom of Christ are, that He rules us through the ministry of His Word and Spirit [Eph. 4:7-12], that He preserves His ministry, gives His Church resting places, makes His Word effectual to the conversion of the elect [Rom. 10:17].” He “intercedes prevailingly for us in heaven, so that the Father does not refuse us anything on account of the virtue and force of His intercession [Luke 22:32].” He bestows upon us heavenly gifts, “such as a true knowledge of God, faith, repentance, and every Christian virtue [Gal. 5:22-23], and He will accomplish all this for us [1 Thess. 5:24],” so “there is no reason why we should doubt in regard to our salvation, for He will preserve it safely for us [John 10:28]” (Ursinus, 259). He will defend us against all enemies (the devil, the evil world, and our sinful nature), and will at length bring

us to heavenly glory. “For He must reign, until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:25-26).

Question 52: WHAT COMFORT IS IT TO YOU THAT CHRIST “SHALL COME TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD”? **That in all my sorrows and persecutions, I, with uplifted head, look for the very One, who offered Himself for me to the judgment of God, and removed all curse from me, to come as Judge from heaven, who shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall take me with all His chosen ones to Himself into heavenly joy and glory.**

Article 7 of the Apostles’ Creed is taken directly from the Bible: “the Lord Jesus Christ...will judge the living and the dead at His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:1; cf. Acts 10:42; 1 Peter 4:5). “But of that day and hour no one knows” (Matt. 24:36). There is only one second coming of Christ. Nowhere does the Bible teach that Jesus is going to return twice, once for His church and then again seven years later. “Christ was offered *once* to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a *second* time” (Heb. 9:28) – not a third time! “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God [“the *last* trumpet,” 1 Cor. 15:52]. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be *caught up [raptured]* together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:16-17). It does *not* say we will secretly meet Christ in the air, and then He will reverse His direction and take us back to heaven only to return again later.

And when Christ comes, it will be “the last day” (John 6:39), “the end of the age” (Matt. 13:39) – the end of the world: “*at His coming. Then comes the end*” (1 Cor. 15:23). For “the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, *in which* the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and ...both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). Then God will create “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13). Then it’s Judgment Day! He shall come to judge *everyone* – the *living* and the *dead*. **Everyone will be resurrected and judged the same day** (Matt. 25:31-32)! The “*hour* is coming in which *all* who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28). God “has appointed *a day on which He will judge the world*” (Acts 17:30). At the conclusion of Judgement Day, the wicked “will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:46).

Now we are in a position to interpret Revelation 20, the only place in the Bible which mentions the millennium – the 1000 year-reign of Christ. We must interpret Revelation 20 in light of the rest of the NT (not the other way around). Since the rest of the NT says that **there are only two ages** – “this present age and the age to come eternal life” (Luke 18:30), it follows that the millennium must fit in somehow with Christ’s present reign in heaven. It is not a violation of Scripture to interpret the number 1000 symbolically to refer to a long, indefinite time period (Deut. 7:9; Joshua 23:10; Psalm 50:10). Regardless, we are called to comfort one another with Christ’s promised return and to confess together, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20).

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