

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN

Rev. H. Hofman sr. - Lord's Day 12, Question 32

Psalter 417

Scripture: John 15

Psalter 429

Psalter 373:1-5

Psalter 407

Dear congregation, we ask your attention for Lord's Day 12 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 32:

Question 32: But why art thou called a Christian?

Answer: Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may confess His Name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him: and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life: and afterwards reign with Him eternally, over all creatures.

We wish to consider:

The True Christian

1. The True Christian Confesses the Name of Christ
2. The True Christian Follows the Footsteps of Christ
3. The True Christian Triumphs with Christ

I repeat: The True Christian: First, The True Christian Confesses the Name of Christ; secondly, The True Christian Follows the Footsteps of Christ; and thirdly, The True Christian Triumphs with Christ.

Last week we considered the offices of Christ according to Question and Answer 31, that He is the anointed Servant of the Lord, to be our chief Prophet, our only High Priest, and our eternal King. After having heard about this precious

and necessary work of Christ, the question, "Why art thou called a Christian?" should not surprise us. This is a very important question and strictly personal for all of us. When Christ is preached, when He sends His servants to go into the world, as He commanded His disciples before His ascension, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," when this name Jesus Christ is preached, that He is ordained of God the Father to be our chief Prophet, our only High Priest, and eternal King, then the question must be asked, "What think ye of Christ?" We can never be or remain neutral. The question today is for all of us, for old and young. What is Christ for you? So many years already the name of Christ is preached among you, that only Name given among men whereby we must be saved. Christ is preached in His offices as Prophet, Priest, and King. And now the question comes to us, "But why art thou called a Christian?"

It means, congregation, that we all bear the name Christian. But we must ask, "Do you bear that name in the right way?" Is your walk of life--your words, your deeds--consistent with that name? In other words, are we living a Christian life, not according to what we think, but to what it *really* means to be a Christian?

The name Christian is so often just a label and does not describe our life. We must not look at others, but we must examine our own lives. There are thousands upon thousands who are only nominal Christians and have no personal part in the spiritual reality denoted by that Name. In the light of all this, the Question of the Catechism is of great significance, "Why art thou called a Christian?" Are you called a Christian merely because you go to church, because of your religious feelings, because you are baptized, or because you are not a heathen? Is that the reason why we are called Christians? Does this name in its true, spiritual significance apply to us personally? Do you know the meaning of that precious Name Christ, and knowing it can you claim the right to bear it? It is so necessary that we search our heart by the light of God's Word and Spirit. We all have a deceitful heart, and we are on our way to appearing before the judgment seat of God. We cannot deceive God. He is the Searcher of our hearts, and He knows our secret thoughts.

We can talk about the nominal Christians of the world, but if we stay by God's Word, then we know that the Pharisees in the days of Jesus, who were extremely strict and religious, were enemies of Christ. They crucified the Lord of

lords, the Lord Jesus Christ. We all know the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins. There were ten virgins, and we would call them all Christians. The foolish virgins also had burning lamps. They confessed a sound doctrine. They were waiting for the bridegroom, and they expected to enter into the marriage feast. They were good Christians, so to speak, but (and this is the point of the Catechism today) they had no oil in their vessels. Their lamps had gone out and they found the door shut. Bearing the name Christian, they found the door shut.

Thus again, dear congregation, "Why art thou called a Christian?" Let us not continue to listen to or to say what it is not, but let us listen to the Catechism as it explains what it really means to be called a Christian. Then we can search our hearts and lives by the light of God's Holy Word as to whether we are a true Christian, and whether we bear the name Christian according to God's Word. The heart of the answer to this question is contained in the words of the Catechism, "Why art thou called a Christian? Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing." That is the true Christian, according to the Catechism on the basis of the Word of God, and God's Word is the truth. God's Word is the only measuring-stick, the only touchstone. We must always compare our life and heart by the light of God's Word.

"Why art thou called a Christian? Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing." Those who are in Christ are new creatures, and they alone. I am a Christian because I am in Christ, because I am a member of His body, and He is the Head. I belong to Him. And as the member is nothing apart from the head, or as the branch is nothing apart from the vine, so I am nothing apart from Christ.

Congregation, this is a sharp sword, but it is a true touchstone, a true measuring-stick. I have read for you John 15, and I hope that you will all read it again today or tomorrow. We must read it every day to see the necessity of being in Christ. Jesus says to His disciples, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit out of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the Vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing." Without Christ we are dead in trespasses and sins. And although we bear the name Christian, and although we have a sound doctrine, without Christ we are dead in Adam, we are bound to that old root, and then we are under the curse of

the law and the wrath of God. "Without Me ye can do nothing." He is the only source of light, He is the only way, He is the only truth, He is the only life.

Let us never forget that the true Christian, first, is a member of Christ. That is what the Catechism teaches us today. "Why art thou called a Christian? Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing." To be a true Christian is the work of Christ imparting Himself to us through His Word and Spirit. That is first, that is the foundation. We must be born again; we must be cut off from Adam, that old stem, and be planted in Christ in order to become a branch of that Vine by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. "I am a member of Christ." They are called by Christ irresistibly, inwardly, by the Holy Spirit. As a dead sinner, they have heard the voice of the Son of God. They are made alive by the life of Christ. Oh, they are cut off from the old stem, Adam, and are ingrafted in the vine which is Christ. They are led by the Holy Spirit. What a wonder, what a great miracle of God's goodness! Here we see the power of that only King, how that He gathers His church from the east and from the west, from the south and from the north. He as King reigns over all, and all those who are given Him of the Father He shall bring into His marvellous light. He shall break the power of Satan. He will take away their stony heart and give them a heart of flesh. They become a partaker, a member, of Christ. That new life, that life of Christ, the new man, is imparted in the heart of a dead sinner, and only through Christ is a dead sinner made alive. That is first. We must all from dead be made alive. That is God's work from beginning to end.

"Because I am a member of Christ." Are you, congregation? We bear the name Christian, we go to a Christian church, we confess the Christian religion, our children are brought up in the Christian doctrine, we are baptized in the name of the Triune God--we are called Christians, but are you a member of Christ by regeneration? Are you born again by the Holy Spirit? I hope that it is a question about which you are concerned. So many so-called Christians live unconcerned about their eternal destination. They are born under the administration of the means of grace. They are brought up in the church, in Sunday school, in a Christian school, reading the Bible, and they are unconcerned about their soul. They live the way they are born, and so many die the way they are born.

Who are true Christians? "Because I am a member of Christ," and the Catechism continues, "by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing." We

cannot be a true Christian without faith. That is something which is also a gift of God. Paul said to the Ephesians, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." They are a member of Christ by faith. What does that mean? It means that when Christ by His Holy Spirit makes a dead sinner, a dead branch, into a lively branch of that only Vine, then it bears fruit in the heart of a sinner. Faith is an instrument. Faith is the hand of the beggar, as it is called by our forefathers. Faith is an instrument, a work, and a gift of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a sinner to embrace Christ and all His merits. Faith is an instrument whereby we may own His work and His Person, led by the Holy Spirit whose work it is to glorify Christ. In Question and Answer 21 of the Catechism, we have discussed what true faith is. "True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel, in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God." Thus faith is an instrument worked by the Holy Spirit in the heart of a sinner whereby we are able to receive that great gift of God, as Paul said when he spoke about Christ, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

To be a member of Christ by faith points to what God has done by the Holy Spirit in regeneration, in the renewing of the heart, but also a sinner by faith is then able, by the exercises of faith, to embrace Christ. "Why art thou called a Christian? Because I am a member of Christ by faith." It is impossible to embrace and to receive Christ without faith. It is as an instrument given and worked and planted in the heart of a sinner. Without faith we have no hands to receive, to embrace, to accept Christ. I have seen that in a very touching manner when I was in Bolivia. In La Paz, the capital of Bolivia, there were thousands and thousands of people walking on the streets. There were rich people and there were also many beggars. Old women were sitting on the streets the whole day, begging for alms. Every step you take, you could give something to such a poor, begging people. But that is impossible. However, I came across a man who was standing there, and I felt in my pocket for something to offer him. I was about to give it to this man, but do you know what I then noticed and what really struck me?--He had no hands. His hands had been cut off. He had two arms without hands. There I stood with a piece of money, and he could not accept it. He had no hands to

receive it. Then he looked with his eyes to his pocket, so I put it in his pocket. I think I will never forget that experience. I stood before him and offered him money, but he had no hands to receive it.

Congregation, "Why art thou called a Christian? Because I am a member of Christ by faith." The Lord has given instruments to receive Christ and all His benefits. There is no true Christian without hands, without faith. In regeneration, faith is implanted in the heart, and that faith must grow. Faith can be very small and weak. It is not always in exercise, but it is there. It never will be taken away. What is given, that is given. That which is God's work is forever. That is the true Christian. Do you have hands, faith, to receive the benefits of Christ? This consists, as we have read already in Question 21, in a knowledge that there is grace and that Christ has given Himself as a ransom for sinners, but faith is also an instrument whereby we may own the gift which is laid in our hands. That beggar could not take the money, because he had no hands. But, congregation, the true Christian has hands, and when Christ is revealed, imparted, given, then there is faith in the heart to embrace Christ and to bring our faith into exercise.

"Because I am a member of Christ." It is God's work, one-sided, sovereign, but by faith that which God has given and what He has done in the great gift of His Son may become my own. Faith may embrace Christ. "And thus am partaker of His anointing." This means that the same Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is leading me, that the Spirit of Christ is guiding me, and instructing me. Wherein?--in the way, the work, the Name, in the Person, in the state, in the nature of Christ. That same Spirit of Christ is working in my heart. The same Spirit of Christ is leading me in the truth. That is the true Christian.

What are the fruits thereof? The Catechism continues, "Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing, that so I may confess His Name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him: and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life: and afterwards reign with Him eternally, over all creatures." In other words, the true Christian who is a member of Christ by faith, who is led and anointed by the Spirit of Christ, is a prophet, a priest, and a king. They are office-bearers, not in special offices, such as serving in the church of God, but all God's children, all true Christians, are prophets, priests, and kings. That is why I understand that many true Christian women whom I have met, who were led and

anointed by the Spirit of Christ, had a desire to speak well of God and His service in the place where the Lord had set them. Don't misunderstand me that I am talking about special offices. We know that it is according to God's Word not to allow women to be ministers, elders, or deacons, not to be office-bearers. But I mean to say that also in the life of women there is a desire to speak about the ways of the Lord, and a strong desire to confess His Name. All God's children, all true Christians, whether it be male or female, are priests, prophets, and kings.

Let us first sing from Psalter 373, stanzas 1 through 5.

"That so I may confess His Name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him: and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life: and afterwards reign with Him eternally, over all creatures." The true Christian is a prophet, a priest, and a king. What exercises are now apparent? We read in 1 Peter 2:9, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." What does it mean to confess His Name? They are called to be a prophet. Christ said, "Without Me ye can do nothing." It is not their words, it is not their desire, but it is the work of the Holy Spirit, of the Spirit of Christ, in their hearts. They are made partakers of Christ's anointing. The Spirit of Christ works in them. To confess His Name means to believe His work, to embrace His work, and in the lowest state it can be a longing, a hunger and a thirst after the righteousness of Christ, and that they need His instruction. To confess His Name can be, so to speak, with a closed mouth, but that, in their walk, in their desire, and from the outgoings of their hearts, you can see what is at the bottom of their heart. To confess His Name does not mean that we always are speaking it, or that we are always preaching in the family or wherever, no, but that we show with our whole life who our life is, what is going on in the bottom of our heart, and what our secret desire is. Oh congregation, to confess His Name can be so weak in the beginning. It can be done so silently in the beginning, and that they hardly dare to speak to others. But there are moments, sometimes in the family, sometimes with their husband or with their wife, sometimes with their children, when they cannot keep their mouth shut. Then they start to speak. Especially when people talk irreverently about Jesus and His work, it causes such a pain in their heart. There are moments when they cannot keep their mouth shut. Then they start to

Speak about the longings of their heart and their desire to know Him. You can hear it sometimes in their prayers. Are you a person who prays in the family, fathers? Can your children and your wife hear it in your family devotions that you confess His Name? And if a father is not at home, mothers, do you pray at the table? Or is it always a quiet prayer? To confess His Name, let your children, your husband, your wife, hear who is the most important Person in your life. Or are you not a true Christian, but have only the name? Does it never come from your lips what lives in your heart, or does Christ not live in your heart? Are you afraid to confess His Name?

"Why art thou called a Christian?" I know faith can be weak and small, but if it never comes to the surface, if it always can remain inside, if the fear of man always has the upperhand, then I am afraid that Christ is not the main Person in your life. "Why art thou called a Christian?" To confess His Name. The Holy Spirit leads more and more to the knowledge of their own heart and to their shortcomings, their own sins and foolishness, but the Holy Spirit also makes room for Christ. If they sometimes see a little bit of Him, if they see Him through His work, then they cannot be quiet, but then they confess His Name--sometimes in the Lord's Supper, sometimes after the Lord's Supper, sometimes unexpectedly when the Lord comes over in the night, or if the Lord comes over under the preaching of God's Word. Then they cannot keep their mouth shut. Then they confess His Name in their family, to their children, but also to their neighbors.

Are you a prophet? Have you ever confessed His Name? The opposite of confession is denial, to deny His Name because of the fear and favor of man. The Lord Jesus Christ says, "But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven." We all know that Peter, in the palace of the high priest, denied his Master. Oh congregation, I think about the Lord's Supper. What is in your heart? Are you a Christian and do not confess His Name? Are you afraid and filled with the fear of man, afraid of your husband, your wife, your children, for those sitting next to you in the church? When the table of the Lord is ready and the word of the Master comes to us, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you," and you feel the drawing of His love, do you remain in your seat? To confess His Name. He is so worthy to be praised. Is there a longing and a desire in your heart to speak about it, also to your children who have left the truth, who have left the church? Do you confess His Name?

The opposite is to deny His Name. The true Christian--I will not say that they never deny Him--I have already mentioned Peter--but it comes back to us, and we feel guilty. If you have the opportunity to speak about what you believe and what you have found in Christ, and you keep your mouth shut, then you feel guilty when the opportunity is gone. Then it comes back in our conscience.

"That so I may confess His Name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him." That is the calling to be a priest, the calling to the priestly office in the life of God's children. I think we don't like it so much to do something to present ourselves "a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him." We have to understand it in the right way. It does not mean that we must give something to the Lord that the Lord can use and that we must help the Lord. No, that is not the meaning. The meaning is the same as it says here: "and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him." God's child must follow in the footsteps of Christ. It means to consecrate ourselves with soul and body, with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, with all things and in every area of life--in our homes, school, shops, our business, our field--in everything, "Lord, I am not working for myself, but my whole life, body and soul, is consecrated to the living God, to my God, to my Christ. I am not my own." Christ, as the only High Priest, gave His life unto death as a ransom for sin and as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of His people. But, congregation, to present myself means to die to myself. I live not for myself, but I give myself unto the Lord. I give my life, with my wife, my husband, and all my possessions, to the Lord. We read in Romans 12:1, 2, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." It means that we give our life into the hands of the Lord. Then the footsteps of the Master are also the footsteps of the church, of the true children of God. I have read it for you from John 15, where Jesus says, "It hated Me"--that means that the world has hated Christ, and all God's children can expect that the world will hate them. Paul said, "The world has crucified me," but he also said, "I have crucified the world."

I think again about mission work. I also saw how people in the small villages were living. They live in clay huts with straw roofs. The Lord willing, and

if He makes all things well, then I believe that it is the area where the Lord is giving us a field to work, but then to sacrifice, to present ourselves as a living sacrifice of thankfulness. That we bring the gospel to such an area and under such circumstances is also a sacrifice of myself. Paul went through so many troubles, so many difficulties, giving his life, giving himself, as a living sacrifice for the sake of Christ's kingdom, and for the extension of God's kingdom. Oh, to bring the gospel to people who are living in poor circumstances has also touched my heart. Nobody cares for their souls. And then to bring myself as a sacrifice of thankfulness, "Oh Lord, Thou hast given us the anointing of Christ. Thou hast given us the light of Thy grace in our heart. Thou hast given us faith in our heart to embrace Christ. Lord, may I now bring the gospel also to those poor people, whatever the circumstances are in which they live." Then we may bring ourselves as a sacrifice of thankfulness unto God. Congregation, I do not say that we must all go to the mission field, but you can give of yourself in the collections. This doesn't mean a certain amount of money, but part of yourself. "Oh Lord, we have received Thy mercy and Thy grace, and there are thousands and thousands of people who are born in darkness, live in darkness, and die in darkness." Then you can give money as a part of yourself, as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. That is also being a priest. That is being a true Christian. They also see that there are others, the same offspring as they are, who are still living in darkness.

And finally, "also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life: and afterwards reign with Him eternally, over all creatures." Congregation, who is your greatest enemy? Do you know the answer of the true Christian? The true Christian says, "Me. I see sin and my corrupt nature. I am the greatest enemy." There is so much fighting, but not with a free and good conscience. But the true Christian with a good and free conscience fights against sin and against themselves. In the first place they are afraid of themselves. What a wonder if the light of God's Spirit shines in our heart. Then we become sinners. We fight, not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual powers in the air. True Christians fight against the world with its temptations, and so often also in the life of a Christian the world overcomes them. Then they are overflowing with the things of the world. But they are never satisfied with it. They know their own heart. They know the evil of the world and

the deceiving power of Satan. They have to fight against sin, the world, and the devil in this life. It continues until the last breath.

But afterwards, as we may read in God's Word, when their journey here upon earth ends, then Jesus says, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." The true Christian will overcome sin, the world, and the devil, because their Head, Jesus Christ, overcame these enemies. Then they will enter into heaven, into the glory of God. There they may see their King forever and ever. There the true Christian is at home.

Congregation, are you a true Christian?

Amen.

Psalter 407: All Stanzas