

THE DEATH OF CHRIST AND THE DEATH OF GOD'S CHILDREN

Rev. H. Hofman sr. - Lord's Day 16, Question 42

Psalter 101

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5

Psalter 439

Psalter 420:1, 2

Psalter 29

Dear congregation, we ask your attention for Lord's Day 16 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 42:

Question 42: Since then Christ died for us, why must we also die?

Answer: Our death is not a satisfaction for our sins, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life.

With God's help, we wish to consider:

The Death of Christ and The Death of God's Children

1. The Death of God's Children is Not Satisfaction for Sin
2. The Death of God's Children is an Abolishing of Sin
3. The Death of God's Children is a Passage Into Eternal Life

I repeat: The Death of Christ and The Death of God's Children: First, The Death of God's Children is Not Satisfaction for Sin; secondly, The Death of God's Children is an Abolishing of Sin; and thirdly, The Death of God's Children is a Passage Into Eternal Life.

Last time we left off at the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ as we meditated on Question and Answer 41, "Why was He also 'buried'? Thereby to prove that He was really dead." Now we are called to meditate on the death of Christ and the death of God's children. "Since then Christ died for us, why must we also

die?" Thus the instructor keeps us by the cemetery. We know from experience that we usually desire to linger at the place where our dear ones are buried. It is always hard to say a last farewell to our dear ones. But on the other hand, it is also true that there is always a reluctance to visit a cemetery. We would rather stay away from a cemetery, or if we are there, we want to leave as soon as possible. It is against our nature.

But, congregation, according to the Catechism and also Holy Scripture, we would say today that it is good to stay a while at the grave of Jesus Christ, there to meditate on the great and deep meaning of the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is much more to learn than only that which we have heard in Question and Answer 41, that His burial proved that He was really dead. That is also a rich comfort in the life of God's children. It is the strength of faith that in the life of faith we may know that Jesus Christ died for our sins and iniquities. It means that He gave His life as a sacrifice for sin. "Thereby to prove that He was really dead."

At the cemetery where Jesus Christ was buried, many questions are answered, but some questions also arise. Before we leave the burial site of Jesus, we may gather by faith the benefits of His death and burial. We notice the instructor's desire to emphasize the profit of the doctrine of Christ's death and burial. From Christ's burial a stream of blessings is revealed, that we by faith may taste the sweetness of Christ's mediatorial work. The Catechism is intended for the strengthening of the faith of God's children. At the root of true faith lies the desire to know more of Christ and of the profit which we may derive from His work. In the life of faith of God's children, it is always, as long as they are here in this life, in part. Paul says, "We know in part." There is always more to learn. Oh, that it might be our desire to learn more of Christ's burial, so that we may go deeper and deeper into the value of Christ's mediatorial work.

I have said already that at the grave of Jesus Christ many questions are answered, but that there are also new questions which arise. "Why was He also 'buried'? Thereby to prove that He was really dead." The new question which now surfaces is: "Since then Christ died for us, why must we also die? Our death is not a satisfaction for our sins, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life." It seems here that natural and spiritual things are contradicting each other. We do not really understand it. We have heard of the sacrifice, death, and burial of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have heard His last words on the cross, "It is finished," and we have heard that He has satisfied all the requirements. We

cannot understand this question. Death is a punishment for sin. "The wages of sin is death." How is that possible, seeing that Christ has finished His mediatorial work and has fulfilled all the requirements of God His Father? "Since then Christ died for us." In other words, "We were glad to hear it. We have laid our hand of faith on His sacrifice. We have heard to the gladness of our soul, 'It is finished.' We may follow Him from afar. We heard His voice, and we have seen that He was buried. We believe and trust that He was really dead, that everything was enough for God, and that it was enough for Christ. There were times in my life that I could say, 'It is enough for me.'"

But now our question is, if it is enough for God, for Christ, for me, why must I also die, and not only me, but, as the instructor says, us and we? "Since then Christ died for us." He saw it as a question for all God's children, for all those who are given unto Him. We know that Christ died for His entire Church, and that His death was the ransom for all His children--"for us," the instructor says, for all the seed which is given unto Christ from the Father. Christ has finished the work for us, for the entire Church. And now we know, the instructor says, that all God's children must also die. Why is that? If Christ has paid, why must the Church pay also? If Christ has paid for me, why do I also have to pay? In what direction must my thoughts go? Does God demand payment twice, so that Christ must die and that His Church must also die?

There are many questions in the hearts of God's children. So often they are filled with the fear of death. Thus, congregation, we can understand this question, and it is the intention of the instructor to give a clear explanation of the deep meaning of the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not a contradiction, but it is according to God's Word. Scripture teaches us in Ecclesiastes 9:2, "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked." Here is the answer to the question. We must die. Everybody must die. We read in Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death." Moses says in Psalm 90:8, "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance," and in Psalm 90:7, he says, "For we are consumed by Thine anger, and by Thy wrath are we troubled." Hebrews 9:27 says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." In Job 14 we read, "But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?" Isaiah 38 says, "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live." Psalm 89:48 says, "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he

deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?" And so we could continue. We all must die. Even God's children cannot escape the grave.

What is death for man? Death was appointed to man by God as a punishment for sin, as we read in Romans 5:12, "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Even God's children are under the power of death. For the unconverted sinner death is the introduction to judgment and eternal death. There is an essential difference in the death of the unconverted and the death of God's people. Oh, that we might stand still and think about our life, as we hear today about the great difference between the death of God's children and the death of the unconverted. You must expect this question, which I want to lay on your conscience, "Are you converted already?" You know and see around you that every day can be the last day, every step the last step, and almost every Sunday you hear from this place that there is but one step between death and us. Suddenly our life can be taken away by the hand of death.

Congregation, dear young people, boys and girls, are you already converted? Death knocks at the door of our hearts and lives. Fathers and mothers in middle age and older people, the day is far spent. Are you already converted? There is such an essential difference between the death of God's people and the death of the unconverted. Has it ever been a question in your heart, "Why must I die?" Maybe when we are sick or not feeling well, when we have much pain, or when we have an incurable sickness, then these thoughts can sometimes come to us, but when we are in good health, and especially when we are young, we do not think about death. We do not like to go to the cemetery and look at the place where we once must be buried. But oh, I advise you in the name of the Lord, think about the day of your death, the moment that you must depart from this life and stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of your work here upon earth, whether it be good or evil. We must die! For the unconverted sinner death is the introduction to judgment and eternal death. That fills the natural man with dread of death and it makes him through fear of death all his lifetime subject to bondage.

We know that God's children must also die. We know that from the Scriptures and we see it also around us. Stephen was stoned and died. Paul and Peter, all the apostles, and all God's children of the past died. Many of them were put to death by violent means. Why? "Why must we also die?" Many of God's

children who died by violent means were not even buried. Why must we die? Why must God's child go through such a way?

When we consider these things, they seem so contradictory. Do we now understand the question of the Catechism, "Why must we also die?" Christ died for us. The victory of death is overshadowed by the tears that are shed at the grave of God's children. Thus the question remains. He for whom another has died ought not himself to die, otherwise God would seem to demand a double satisfaction for one offence. Should it not be, "Christ now has died for us, therefore we ought not to die"?

Congregation, we ought not to die for the sake of satisfaction, the instructor says. "Our death is not a satisfaction for our sins." There is another reason. God's Word sheds light on this dark path of the death of God's children. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:50, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." And even God's children, all creatures, are flesh and blood. There is no way to inherit the kingdom of God as flesh and blood. You can read this in 1 Corinthians 15 where it says, "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." God's children must die so that they may truly receive the benefits purchased by the death of Jesus Christ. The temporal death of God's children is also necessary. First, it is an admonition of the remains of sin in them; secondly, an admonition of the greatness of the evil of sin; thirdly, an abolishing of the remains of sin; and fourthly, a passage into life eternal, for the entering into eternal life is effected by temporal death. It is necessary for God's children that they may know until the end of their life the sin which cleaves to them, and may also experience that there is a longing in their hearts to depart from this world and to be with the Lord forever and ever. In the life to come they will be perfectly free from all the remains of sin.

Then we must also notice that the Catechism does not directly answer the question. It does indeed explain that the death of God's children is no satisfaction for sin. But the question as to why the death of God's children is necessary is not answered. The question remains open, so to speak. Why must God's children pass through the suffering of physical death? Why could they not be translated without enduring suffering? Enoch was translated. Elijah ascended up into heaven without seeing death. God's child who is living at the time of the second coming of Christ shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Why could not all God's children be glorified and taken up into heaven without having

to face the horror of death and the grave? Congregation, there is an answer to this question, even though we understand that we cannot come to the bottom of it. Above all these questions there is God's sovereignty, God's holy will. Is God not able to do as He did with Elijah and Enoch, and as it will be in the last day with all God's children who are then living? Then we must say, yes. But there is God's sovereignty. He is the great Potter. He has determined the way to eternity for all His children.

The Catechism also says that the death of God's children is an abolishing of sin. What does that mean? The reality of physical death is not limited to the moment of death when the spirit leaves the body, but the death of God's children involves their entire earthly existence. They are born in the midst of death with a corruptible and mortal body. While living their earthly life, they die constantly. The power of death reveals itself in all the diseases, and in all the sufferings and sorrow of this present time. In this corruptible body they lie in the midst of death and must needs pass through death and through the grave into glory. They must know by experience from how great a depth of sin and misery they came, and how the Lord has delivered them from such a death. They must have experience of the suffering and power of death. From the depths they must cry unto God.

Moreover, it is only in the body of this death that God's children are able to fulfill their calling in this world. It is here the church militant, and they must fight against sin. We read in Philippians 1:29, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." They are in Christ by grace and by the Holy Spirit. They must become one plant with Christ, also in His death. Jesus has said that the servant must go in the way of the Master. The Master suffered and paid with His death. He finished His satisfactory and mediatorial work, but all His children must follow Him, being one with Him.

And there is yet another thing. Death is the punishment of sin. It is the last enemy. It is the expression of the full wrath of God against sin. And now here is the wonder of grace: Christ died in the place of His people, and that is the complete satisfaction for sin. The death of God's children is no longer to be considered a manifestation of the wrath of God. It is no longer to be considered a punishment for sin. All the suffering, sorrow, and grief, of this present time is the operation of death, but it is not satisfaction for sin.

Congregation, this means that all the present suffering of God's children of soul and body are no longer to be considered as punishment for sin and

expressions of the righteous judgment of God. For God's children the suffering of this present time has lost its real sting. That is the meaning of Christ's burial. Suffering death is no longer punishment for sin and may not be regarded as such, for Christ died for all their sins. Christ died the death of all His people. He suffered all their sufferings. He died their death. And His death is a complete satisfaction for all their sins, and indeed, the debt is paid in full and God will not demand payment twice. That is the meaning and it is a deep comfort. That is why it is good to remain at the grave of Jesus and to meditate upon His mediatorial work, so that we may come to the conclusion that His death is an absolute and a complete satisfaction. Now all my suffering, my pain, and even my death and burial are not a punishment for sin anymore. It has all been accomplished in the death of Christ.

Do God's children ever have thoughts that God will not demand payment twice? Oh, they are often so far away from this comfort. And why? Because we are not often standing by the grave of Christ, maybe not at all. So often we see and think that God demands payment from us, and therefore we are afraid to die. We are afraid of the grave, because we often fail to lay hold on the work of Jesus Christ. We are so far away from Him. We are so blind to His work, because we are always digging in our own heart. We see our sins and how poor and miserable we are, and speak about our darkness, fruitlessness, and so on, but we never or so little think about and meditate on the finished mediatorial work of Jesus Christ.

Be honest, children of God, have you ever thought that your death cannot be a punishment for your sins because Jesus Christ's death and burial is a complete satisfaction for your sins? That is what the instructor wants to teach us. Our death is not a satisfaction for our sins. Yes, God indeed is displeased with sin, also the sins of His children. It is therefore very good that we humble ourselves before the face of God because of our miserable condition, and that we think about our sins, about our doubt and unbelief, but we may not stop there. Oh, come and see where the Lord was laid. Since He died as a satisfaction for our sins, our death is not a satisfaction for our sins.

The problem is that in our suffering and dying we do not lay hold upon Christ by faith. God does indeed chastise His children, and there is an element of chastisement in all their suffering in this present world. But there is a great difference between punishment and chastisement. Punishment is the expression

of God's just and condemning wrath, and the other is an operation of His fatherly love. Do you hear the difference? We read in Hebrews 12, "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." If we are punished for our sins, there is no hope. That punishment is the threefold death. But if we are chastised, we may rejoice, for it is meant for our good and tends to life. Punishment is for the unconverted.

Do you hear it, my dear congregation? Punishment is for the unconverted. That is why my heart is filled with compassion for the unconverted. Then God demands satisfaction from you. It is not so with God's children. Chastisement is for God's children. Punishment is that suffering that is mixed with the fear of God and His holy anger. Chastisement can be the same suffering, and sometimes more deeply and more painful than that of the world, but it is in God's favor and saving grace. Punishment ends in destruction, but chastisement is for correction, for sanctification. Then all things will work together for good. Do you hear the difference? The death of the unconverted is a punishment for their sins, and behind and above the death of the unconverted is the fierce anger and wrath of God.

And now God's child comes to the end of his life. He has passed through a valley of tears, sometimes has been persecuted, sometimes has had a difficult, hard life, and then he must pass through the valley of the shadow of death. They come to the end of their earthly pilgrimage. There they stand and must pass through the dark valley of death. Above them is not God's punishment, but above, around, and underneath them is God's fatherly love. They have to pass through this dark valley, but under God's fatherly care. He chastises them to bring them, as the Catechism says, to that passage into eternal life.

All things, even death, even this last enemy, shall work together for their good. Even though, judging from outward appearance, their death appears the same as that of the unbeliever, even though they pass through the same agony in departing from this world, their death is essentially different. In that hour of death they cling by faith to their crucified Christ. They know that it is not God's wrath, but His love delivering them from death into life, bringing them home--a passage through death into eternal life.

Oh congregation, the death of God's children is not simply a separation of soul and body--it is much more. But let us first sing from Psalter 420, stanzas 1 and 2.

Do you hear it, children of God? Your death is not satisfaction for your sins. Do you hear it, unconverted fellow travellers to eternity? Your death is a punishment. In your death you will experience the fierce anger and wrath of God. Oh, if you are unconverted, seek the Lord. Death is so close. It is on your left and on your right. It is before you and behind you. It is above you. You are close to death, and then forever to be under the wrath and fierce anger of the Lord in an everlasting burning fire. Oh, I would that I could bind it upon your conscience, that you might try to escape that eternal punishment of sin. But temporal death for God's children--do you hear it, children of God and unconverted ones--is a blessing. Death for God's children is a servant. It is the end of all outward and inward distress and of all the misery which is their portion in the body of this death here on earth. That becomes the entrance into eternal life. We have read to you from 2 Corinthians 5:1, where Paul says, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." If God's children are at the place where they are supposed to be, they long for it. It is not a good sign if God's child never longs for departure from this world. Jacob at the end of his life said, "I have waited for Thy salvation." Of Paul we read in Philippians 1, "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." And in Romans 7, he says, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Temporal death for God's children is a sleep. That is how God's Word speaks about it. Jesus said in John 11:11, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." In 1 Corinthians 15:18, we read, "Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ..." Oh, what a blessing! God's children, when they die, fall asleep in Christ. What a wonder! We read in Acts 7:59 that Stephen was stoned. That causes much pain, congregation. Think about it. And then we read that he fell asleep. The death of God's children is to fall asleep in the arms of Christ, because He, that precious Mediator, that oldest Brother, has made satisfaction for all their sins. Thus death is the gate of heaven. It is the passage to eternal life. Sin is abolished.

God's children cannot overcome sin in this life. They have tried it many, many times. Their greatest concern and the biggest struggle in their life was their own sin, their sinful heart. God's children become strangers on earth more and more. And now they are longing to depart from this world. They are tired of the world; they are tired of themselves; they are tired of sin. Sin has become death to them. They groan in this earthly tabernacle. Sin is their heaviest burden--not the

results of sin, but sin itself. As long as God's child lives, he is in the body of sin, but when he dies, sin dies forever.

And thus death changes into a blessing. It cannot be expressed what blessedness becomes the portion of God's children at the time of their death. Oh, then they may be with the Lord, and they may see the beauty of the King forever and ever. In heaven there shall be no more curse. Here upon this earth they are despised and the world curses them. But in heaven there shall be no more curse, and there shall be no more night, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain. They are partakers of the marriage feast forever and ever. The moon is under their feet and they are above the stars. Everlasting joy shall be their portion.

We may look after our dear ones in sorrow, but God's children shall never look back on us. They are with the Lord. They have received their heart's desire.

What a difference between the death of God's children and the death of the unconverted. Oh, old and young, remember that you too will die. Amen.

Psalter 29:All Stanzas